MISS FALLOWFIELD'S FORTUNE

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

CONCERNING ISABEL CARNABY.

A DOUBLE THREAD.

THE FARRINGDONS.

FUEL OF FIRE.

PLACE AND POWER.

IN SUBJECTION.

CUPID'S GARDEN.

SIRIUS, AND OTHER STORIES.

VERSES WISE AND OTHERWISE.

LOVE'S ARGUMENT, AND OTHER POEMS.

(And in collaboration with Alfred Laurence Felkin)

KATE OF KATE HALL.

"'Darling, won't you marry me?'" (*see page 327*).

MISS FALLOWFIELD'S FORTUNE

BY

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WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVEN SPURRIER

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MISS FALLOWFIELD'S FORTUNE

PROLOGUE

On a summer's afternoon, when the world was some thirty years' younger than it is at present, two girls were sitting at tea in a small lodging-house situated in an obscure watering-place on the Welsh coast. The room in which they sat was typical of its time and place. It was on the ground floor, and formed part of what was termed by its owner "the dining-room set"—which "set" consisted of this sitting-room, and of two small bedrooms at the top of the house. True, there was a bedroom upon the same floor, which to the lay eye appeared to belong by right to the dining-room; but this was an amateurish way of looking at things, as anyone acquainted with the mysteries of seaside lodgings will at once perceive. It is a fixed rule with all lodging-house keepers that the bedroom attached to the dining-room invariably belongs to the "drawing-room set"; and this rule, like all other great laws of nature, must be respected and obeyed, even though its why and wherefore remain hidden in obscurity.

This room revelled in the distinction of commanding what is called a sea view; that is to say, it did indeed face the direction in which the ocean lay; but as it was upon a somewhat lower level than the road, a sight of the horizon-line was only vouchsafed to such occupants as were tall enough to look over the sloping grass-plot in front of the house and the hedge of tamarisk which formed the boundary of the estate. And even tall people could only

attain this glimpse by standing close to the window upon the tips of their toes.

The interior of the room was dreary in the extreme. The paper—a dull red—had been still further darkened by some years' exposure to a persistently smoking chimney; the carpet was perforated by holes which were apt to trip up the unwary, and were but partially concealed by mats composed of heterogeneous morsels of many-coloured cloth fastened together by string, the original shade and pattern of the carpet being lost in dust and antiquity. The furniture was of that kind which had once obviously been covered with horsehair; but the horsehair had long ago worn out and been replaced by a material known as American cloth, which is so slippery in cold weather that one finds it difficult to remain seated, and so adhesive in hot weather that one finds it equally difficult to rise. In addition to the chairs used for sitting at table, there was one (so-called) easy-chair and a sofa; but both these articles of furniture had succumbed to a disease which attacks hardly-worn furniture—a disease which transforms the springs into sinews of iron, strong to resist the advances of all who wish to sit down thereon.

The chimney-piece was adorned with an ormolu clock (of which the internals had been removed), flanked on one side by an insufficiently attired china shepherdess, and on the other by a porcelain bust of John Wesley. Above it hung a tarnished mirror, which was veiled by a profusion of trailing ivy leaves cut out of green tissue paper of varying shades. According to the landlady, these ivy leaves were intended to catch the flies; but how flies could be caught by a substance that neither attracted nor retained, she did not trouble to explain. The fireplace itself was filled with a weird object, somewhat resembling a huge chignon of very coarse grey hair, sparsely sprinkled with threads of gold and silver tinsel.

The only other ornaments in the room were two pictures setting forth respectively the Battle of Armageddon and the Last Judgment—inspiring subjects, cheerfully portrayed! The former represented a cluster of white-winged, fair-haired young ladies leaning over a battlement, and hurling forked lightnings at a host of armed and mounted warriors beneath; and the latter depicted a mountain (suffering apparently from a recent shock of earthquake), clothed on all sides by an extensive cemetery, and crowned with a bevy of white-winged beings similar to those who were throwing the lightnings about in the other picture. The earthquake, which had opened a large fissure at the foot of the mountain, had also very much disturbed the cemetery, tossing the tombstones about as if they were spillikins, and evicting the occupants on all sides. A few of the more fortunate of these were being guided up the mountain by a deputation of fair-haired young ladies from the top; but by far the greater part—including a sprinkling of crowned heads, foremost among whom was his Holiness the Pope—were being hustled pell-mell into the abyss by an unattractive official armed with a pitchfork.

The two inhabitants of this most unbeautiful "dining-room set" were young and good-looking. The elder—a girl of about two- or three-and-twenty—was tall and dark, with aquiline features and a fine figure; and she would have been extremely handsome had not her face shown unmistakable signs of defiance and dissatisfaction. The younger sister was fair, and bore decided resemblance to those sweet beings in the picture who hurled the lightnings and crowned the mountain tops. Her countenance was smooth and unlined, testifying to one of those happy dispositions which in all circumstances has learnt to be content.

"Oh, Phœbe, I'm sick to death of being poor!" It was the elder girl who spoke.

"Never mind, Charlotte darling; there are worse things than being poor."

"Are there? Well, I'm thankful to say I've never come across them."

"Oh! but there are," the fair-haired girl persisted. "It would be far worse for us if we were ill or ugly or old maids."

"No, it wouldn't; nothing could be worse for us than our present condition. What is the use of our good looks, if we can never dress ourselves properly? What is the use of our health, if it is to be wasted upon drudgery? What is the use of our youth, if we are never to get any pleasure out of it? I tell you that poverty is a curse which throws a blight upon everything it touches."

Phœbe shook her head. "I don't agree with you at all, Charlotte. Bad dressing matters far less to pretty people than to plain ones; hard work is much easier for strong folk than for weakly ones; and if your youth has brought you a lover, I don't see that it has altogether been wasted."

"And what is the good of a lover if he will never be able to afford to marry you?" asked Charlotte somewhat brutally.

"Lots and lots of good. There's all the fun of the lovemaking, besides the credit of having got a young man of one's own; and, besides, we shall afford to marry some day; everybody does, sooner or later."

"Not people as poor as we are."

"Oh, dear, yes!" retorted the optimistic Phœbe. "People quite as poor as we are get married every day."

"And a nice time they have of it afterwards!" was the grim rejoinder.

"They worry along right enough, don't you fear! I

can't think why you make such a fuss about our being poor. It is rather horrid, I admit: but it would be far harder if we were old and ugly."

"It will make us old and ugly before our time. Poor people always age far sooner than rich ones."

Phœbe again shook her pretty head. "Not if they've the right sort of complexion. It is your skin far more than your pocket that makes you look old or young; and you and I have both very good skins."

"The worry of making both ends meet is fast scoring lines into mine."

"Then you shouldn't worry so much. I wouldn't get wrinkles into my face for anything." And Phœbe rose from the table and peeped at herself in the mirror through the overhanging tracery of ivy leaves, sighing softly with satisfaction at what she saw.

Charlotte and Phœbe Fallowfield were the children of a retired officer, who had no private means, and whose pension naturally did not survive him. Their mother died while they were yet in their infancy; and since their father's death, some few years before this story opens, they had been entirely dependent upon their own exertions for a living. Charlotte was a teacher in a girls' school, and Phœbe a nursery governess in a country clergyman's family. The former was engaged to be married to Herbert Wilson, a clerk in an accountant's office; and the latter to Derek Silverthorne, the happy-go-lucky Irish curate of her employer. But the chance of either of these engagements being brought to a satisfactory conclusion was very remote indeed, owing to a total lack of means on the part of everybody concerned.

These two girls were representative of a class which merits our profoundest sympathy. Born of well-bred parents, they possessed all the sensitiveness and refinement of gentlepeople; and yet were debarred by the exigencies

of their position from indulging in any of the pursuits and delights which gentlepeople love. Further, this very sensitiveness and refinement unfitted them for that battle for existence which they were doomed to fight, and rendered them specially susceptible to the wounds of those slings and arrows which outrageous Fortune had seen fit to hurl at their innocent heads. They were now enjoying their hardly-earned summer holiday in such a health resort as their very limited means could command. Phœbe, as usual, made the best of things; but Charlotte's artistic susceptibilities were hurt to the quick by the ugliness and squalor of her surroundings.

"By the way, Charlotte, have you been and said a prayer at Saint Winifred's shrine yet?" asked the younger sister, after she had duly contemplated her own charms in the ivy-mantled looking-glass.

"Saint Winifred's shrine! What is that? I've never even heard of it."

"That's just like you! You never hear of anything. That comes of being so stuck-up. You should talk to people as I do, and make friends, and you'd hear no end of interesting things."

Charlotte's lip curled scornfully. "Who would care to make friends of such paupers as we are?"

"Lots and lots of people. As I've told you hundreds of times, money isn't everything. If you are pretty, people will like you, however poor you may be."

"Well, I'm not pretty, as it happens: you are."

Phoebe looked at her elder sister critically. "Not exactly pretty perhaps, but decidedly handsome; and I'm not sure whether in the long run handsomeness doesn't wear better than prettiness. It doesn't fade so soon. I'm sure I often envy you the dignified expression of your nose. There's a sort of Boadicean, Roman-eagle look about it which is distinctly impressive, and which will go on

impressing people after my flower-like charms have faded into pot-pourri."

"Never mind my nose; tell me about Saint Winifred's shrine."

"It is a little shrine on the mountain, quite a long way up, dedicated to Saint Winifred, who was a Welsh lady herself, you know. By the way, I wonder if she wore a tall beaver hat instead of a halo. It would have been rather sweet and patriotic of her if she did."

"But what about her shrine? Is there anything particular to distinguish it that you are so anxious for me to visit the sacred spot?"

"The legend is, that if anyone climbs up the mountain, and prays for something at that shrine with their whole heart, that prayer will be granted. The villagers about here go up sometimes and pray for things even now; but hundreds of years ago it was quite a celebrated place, and grand people came from all over the country to offer up their petitions: kings and queens have been there in their day, and have always had their prayers granted."

Charlotte's dark eyes grew dreamy. "I wonder if it is still true, or if the shrine has lost its power. If I thought it were, I would go up and pray for riches; and I'm sure I would pray with my whole heart."

"Well, I don't mind telling you that I've been," said Phœbe, waxing confidential; "I went up and prayed that Derek and I should soon be able to get married. I thought I'd leave no stone unturned that might help us," she added naïvely, and with no thought of irreverence.

When tea was over and Phœbe had gone down to the beach to play with the children of their fellow-lodgers, Charlotte set her face to ascend the mountain. Her sister's story about the old shrine had seized hold of her imagination, and she was bent upon trying for herself if it still possessed its miraculous power. Though naturally

reserved, she was inwardly exceedingly sensitive to impressions; and anything connected with the unusual or the supernatural had a strong fascination for her. In happier circumstances, where her powers could have had full scope and developed themselves, she would have displayed marked artistic gifts; but as it was, her whole energy was bent upon the absorbing if uninteresting struggle to earn that daily bread which is absolutely necessary to mere existence.

It was an evening in complete harmony with Charlotte's expedition. Heavy clouds loomed up from the west, chasing each other across the heavens like a procession of war chariots; while below them the sun was slowly sinking to his rest "in a bed of daffodil sky." The sea was disturbed and unrestful, crooning to itself its old, old song, in a voice hoarse with the sorrow of the ages, and murmuring its hushed though everlasting defiance against that irresistible decree which has said, "Hitherto shalt thou come but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

With a firm yet light step the girl ascended the steep mountain path which led to the little shrine. On and on she sped, all her thoughts bent on her errand, until she was suddenly brought to a full stop in turning a corner, by coming face to face with a very old clergyman leaning upon a stick. He was tall and thin and evidently of a great age; his white hair fell in silvery locks upon his shoulders, but his complexion and expression were as pure as those of a little child.

Charlotte drew her slight figure up right against the face of the rock in order to allow the venerable stranger room to pass her on the narrow path; but he made no sign of so doing. On the contrary, he remained standing, looking at the girl with a tender smile which was in itself a benediction, while he said—in the most musical voice she had ever heard—

"Whither away so fast, my daughter?"

There was no impertinence in the question, it was so gentle, so fatherly. It seemed as if he had the right to ask: and Charlotte felt constrained to answer.

"To Saint Winifred's shrine."

"I thought as much. And if I read your face aright, my child, you are going there out of no idle curiosity, but with an earnest desire to test the efficacy of the shrine, and the truth of the old legend."

"Yes; that is so," replied Charlotte simply. Her customary reserve melted like snow in the sunshine of the old clergyman's smile. Then an equally unusual impulse to appeal to him for help seized her, and she said, "Do you believe it is true?"

"I have lived here for the greater part of a century, my child, and I have known many, many prayers answered that were offered up at Saint Winifred's shrine. It may be that there is still some strange efficacy in the little mountain altar; or it may be—and this I think is the true reading—that those who come to this shrine pray in such faith that it is done unto them even as they wish, since faith is the lever that never fails to move Almighty Power. 'According to your faith so be it unto you'—is the limit which Omnipotence chooses to make unto Itself."

"Then you think if I pray for one particular thing at the shrine believing I shall get it, my prayer really will be answered?" asked Charlotte, her dark eyes ablaze with excitement.

"I do: and because I think so, I would first have a word with you before you offer up your prayer," replied the old man, seating himself upon a huge boulder that lay by the path, and motioning to Charlotte to do the same.

She obeyed without hesitation. There was that in his face which compelled the reverence and submission of all with whom he was brought into contact.

"I was born in this very neighbourhood some ninety years ago," he began, after they both were seated; "I have spent the greater part of my life here; and many are the supplications which I have known to be offered up at Saint Winifred's shrine. Some of the suppliants have come back to thank God for having heard and answered their prayers; and some have come back to beseech the Lord to take away from them the very thing for which they once so earnestly entreated Him."

"Then they didn't really know what they wanted when first they prayed," exclaimed Charlotte.

"Yes, my child, I think they did. They only did not know what God wanted for them, and they set their own wills before His. And so He gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, and sent leanness into their souls withal."

"But surely we ought to pray for what we want," argued the girl.

"Certainly; but only if it is in accordance with the Will of God that we shall have it."

"And if it isn't in accordance with His Will?"

"Then we should pray that His Will may overrule ours, and that we may find 'profit by losing of our prayers.'"

Charlotte shivered slightly, though the evening was warm. "I couldn't pray like that. If I want a thing I do want it, whether it is good for me or whether it isn't. And if it isn't good for me, I am prepared to take the consequences."

"I see, I see; many are like that. And sometimes God lets them take the consequences, and so learn wisdom. But this is not the most excellent way of learning."

"It is a better way than not getting the thing you want, and spending the rest of your life in kicking against the pricks. I would far rather be unhappy in my own way, than happy in anyone else's!"

The old clergyman smiled. "You are very young, my child."

"I am twenty-three."

"And I am ninety-three. Seventy years makes all the difference in one's sense of perspective."

"And I want so dreadfully the thing that I do want!"

"So did I, when I was your age; and I prayed with all my heart for it at Saint Winifred's shrine. But I also prayed that God's Will should overrule mine."

"And what happened?"

"Twenty years later I went back to the shrine and thanked God upon my knees that He had denied my request."

Again Charlotte shivered. "Twenty years was a long time."

"Not long as compared with ninety; and still shorter as compared with eternity," replied the old clergyman, rising from his seat.

Charlotte rose also. "I think I would just as soon never learn a lesson at all as take twenty years to learn it," she persisted.

"So I thought when I was twenty-three, my daughter; but I have since learnt otherwise."

"And I am so sure that what I want is the right thing—the thing that will make me good as well as happy—that I feel I can ask for it with no reservation whatever."

"I was just as sure seventy years ago." The stranger could be as obstinate as Charlotte. "Good-bye, my child," he continued, making way for her to pass him on the narrow path; "go forward to offer up your petition; and may God be with you! But remember that if we set our hearts too much upon anything—if we make up our minds that we will have it whether it is in accordance with the Divine Will or not—we are sometimes taught wisdom by the bitter experience of having our prayers answered at all

costs. Sometimes—I speak with all reverence—it seems to me as if God stood aside and allowed us to have our own way, because we have used the gift of free-will by preferring it to His. And now, good night."

And without another word the venerable stranger went on his way down the mountain.

Charlotte also pursued her errand undaunted by the old man's warning.

"I am sure," she argued with herself, "that poverty is not only spoiling my life and destroying my chance of happiness; it is also eating into my character and making me bitter and ill-tempered and morbid. If only I were freed from the constant strain of pecuniary anxiety, I believe I could develop into a good as well as a clever woman. The three great duties of life are to serve God, to perfect ourselves, and to help our fellow-creatures; and poverty makes all three impossible. How can one have time to serve God properly, if one is compelled to toil from morning to night to earn one's daily bread? How can one perfect one's own character, if one is being constantly jarred and fretted by the sordid and squalid worries which invariably follow in poverty's train? And how can one help one's fellow-creatures, if one is too poor even to help oneself? I am sure that wealth is the best as well as the happiest thing for me; and I shall pray for it with all my heart, and cheerfully take the consequence of its disabilities—if any disabilities there be!"

So the girl communed with her own soul until the path she was following came to an end at a small shrine high up on the mountain—a lonely and impressive spot. On one side of the path a steep precipice went down sheer into the sea; and on the other the black rock rose straight up skywards; and in this rock was carved a little niche holding a roughly-hewn image of the patron saint of the shrine. In front of the image was a small altar;

and below that a large stone worn flat by the knees of the thousands who in bygone ages had offered up their petitions there ; while by its side a pellucid spring bubbled up out of the rock, and dashed itself over the precipice in a shower of silvery spray.

On the flat stone, where so many thousands before her had prayed and had not prayed in vain, Charlotte Fallowfield fell upon her knees and besought the God who had made her for the one gift which He had denied—the gift of worldly possessions. She prayed as she had never prayed before ; for the atmosphere of the place lent itself to the spirit of supplication, and gave the impression of being in close touch with the Unseen. Far away from the haunts of man, with no sign of human habitation in sight and with the impenetrable sky above it and the unfathomable sea below, it seemed a spot cut off from all the habitable parts of the earth ; such a spot as that where Moses stood when he hid in the cleft of the rock while the glory of the Lord passed by.

There are many voices in Nature for those that have ears to hear them ; and they all call us to different things.

The voice of the forest is the voice of love. Have we not all heard the whispering of the woodland which lures us deeper and deeper into the hidden places, with hinted promises that we shall there at last find our heart's desire ? As children we have felt the fascination of those fairy-tales which told of enchanted castles and spell-bound palaces hidden away in the heart of a wood ; and we have entered into the spirit of the fairy prince, who fought his way through briar and tangle, and thorn and thicket, until at last he discovered the sleeping beauty who awaited him there. And even children of a later growth feel the spirit of that fairy prince still stealing over them when they stand in the midst of a forest on a summer's day. Then suddenly all the stories of chivalry and romance become

possible. Forest lovers may be found resting under any bush; gentle knights may be seen pricking across any glade. Each tree whispers to us its magic secret; each grassy path beckons us to follow it until we find our beloved awaiting us in a banqueting house whereof the beams are of cedar and the rafters of fir. Every pilgrim of life at some time or other passes through Arcady; every wanderer's path goes by way of the Forest of Arden; and even though we may have travelled a long way since then and our feet be weary and our faces worn, Arden and Arcady come back to us once more when we stand on a summer's day in the heart of a wood. So the voice of the forest is the voice of love.

The voice of the sea is the voice of sorrow; the sorrow of unsatisfied longing, for the sea is never at rest or content; the sorrow of rebellion, for its breakers are for ever hurling themselves in vain against that unseen yet immutable barrier beyond which they may not pass; and the sorrow of mortality, for its doom is fixed, and it is written that in the new heaven and the new earth there shall be no more sea. Like its own mermaids who grieve because they have no souls and therefore are not immortal, the sea is for ever bemoaning its finality. It may rage against the children of men when they occupy their business in great waters; it may carry them up to heaven and down again to the deep, till their souls melt away because of their trouble; it may dash them to pieces against the rocks, and hide their bodies in its caves where there is no man to bury them; yet it knows that in their essence they are greater than itself, and that its conquest over them is only for a time. For when their corruption shall have put on incorruption and their mortal shall have put on immortality, then the sea shall be compelled to give up its dead; and—like death itself—shall at last be swallowed up in victory. So the voice of the sea is the voice of sorrow.

And the voice of the mountain is the voice of prayer. Over against each other stand the everlasting hills—crag above crag, peak beyond peak—thus forming "the world's great altar-stairs, which slope through darkness up to God." And some of God's greatest revelations to man have been made upon a mountain. It was upon a mountain that Elijah stood at the mouth of a cave, and wrapped his face in his mantle at the sound of the still, small Voice; it was upon a mountain that the favoured Apostles were eye-witnesses of the majesty of their Master, and received the message from the Excellent Glory; and it was upon a mountain that the men in white apparel heralded the second coming of Christ to the waiting disciples, telling them that He shall come in like manner as they had seen Him go. Which teaches us that—in accordance with the great doctrine of free-will—man must do his part, feeble though it be, in going forth to meet his God. The Almighty may stoop from heaven to visit the sons of men; but they also must do what they can to rise from earth and meet Him as He comes. Unless they stretch out the hands of faith towards Him—unless they climb the altar-stairs that lead up to His sanctuary—they will never see the glory of the Lord. Those in the valley may tremble before the sound of the tempest and the earthquake and the fire; but it is only those who have scaled the mountain that hear the whisper of the still, small Voice. So the voice of the mountain is the voice of prayer.

This was the spirit that fell upon Charlotte Fallowfield, as she lifted up her prayer with her whole heart. But to her supplication she added no petition that her will might be overruled by the Divine Will, or her wishes be made submissive to the guidance of Almighty Wisdom. She merely begged for her own will and her own way, and she took no account of any other.

When she came down again from the mountain the

evening shadows were closing in, and she found Phœbe sitting alone in the twilight.

"How late you are!" exclaimed the latter; "I was beginning to think you were lost, stolen or strayed. There is a letter for you from Herbert by the last post."

Charlotte took her letter, which was propped up against the bust of John Wesley, and then proceeded to light the gas in order to read it. The gas—as is the way of gas in lodging-houses—flared up like a gasping volcano and then settled down into semi-darkness, knowing no middle course between setting the house on fire and giving no light at all; and in the flickering twilight, which was the lesser of these two evils, Charlotte read her love-letter.

"Would you believe it?" she cried when she had finished. "Bertie is on his way to America by this time!"

"To America? What for? What a funny place for a person like Bertie to go to, who is generally afraid of venturing as far as Clapham Junction for fear of catching cold!" Poor Herbert's delicate health was always a subject of scorn on the part of the youthful and vigorous Phœbe.

Charlotte's eyes were bright and her cheeks burning with excitement. "Don't you remember that Bertie had an uncle Josiah who went to America years ago, and then disappeared?"

"I do recall something of the kind now that you mention it. But I never asked any question about the matter, as I think it is generally kinder not to do so about relations who disappear."

"Well, he has had a letter from this uncle saying that he is very ill and would like to see Bertie before he dies, and sending him the money to defray all his travelling expenses. So Bertie has started for America at once."

"Wonderful pluck on Bertie's part! I hope he remembered to take a warm coat with him."

"Phœbe, don't be horrid. Bertie can't help having a delicate chest."

"But he can help coddling it as much as he does. never knew such a man for taking care of himself. Derek and I think it is perfectly ridiculous."

"Derek and you are strong people," argued Charlotte, doing battle for the lover whom she adored all the more because he leaned upon her and looked up to her, resting his weakness upon her strength. "I wonder if his uncle is a rich man," she added.

"Not he; uncles never are. Or at any rate if they are, they leave it all to charity. It's a pretty little way they have."

Charlotte took no notice of her sister's gibes. She was thinking of the little shrine upon the mountain side, and the prayer she had offered up before it. "I wonder if he is," she repeated softly to herself. And she went to bed and fell asleep still wondering.

For over a fortnight nothing happened to disturb the monotony of the little Welsh village by the sea. Then great excitement broke the peace. A letter came from Herbert saying that he had arrived at his uncle's, and had found the latter in a dying condition, though quite conscious and delighted to see his nephew; and the epistle went on to state—much to Phœbe's scornful amusement—that the writer had contracted a slight cold during the voyage, and was nursing it.

"Trust Herbert for catching a cold and making the most of it, wherever he may be!" she exclaimed, greatly to her elder sister's annoyance.

The next mail brought a still more thrilling communication. Herbert wrote that the old man had died, leaving the whole of his fortune to his nephew. Herbert did not yet know the exact amount, but the lawyers assured him that it was something considerable. He went on to say

that he had naturally a good deal of business to attend to; but that shortly he hoped to return to England and marry Charlotte off-hand, as, now that he was a rich man, there was nothing to wait for. His cough, he added, was still troublesome; but since at last he could afford to take care of his health and to go to a warm climate when necessary, he felt sure that his chest would soon be quite strong and well again. And he was full of plans for spending the next winter with Charlotte in Italy, and there deriving much benefit for their minds as well as their bodies.

Then, for the first time in her life, Charlotte Fallowfield was really happy. And she went up to the little mountain shrine, and there fell again upon her knees, and thanked God for having given her her heart's desire.

A week afterwards Charlotte received another letter from America; but this time it was not from Herbert, but was in a strange handwriting. It ran as follows:

"MADAM,—It is with sincere regret that we have to inform you of the death of Mr. Herbert Wilson, the nephew and sole legatee of our late client, Mr. Josiah Wilson. Mr. Herbert Wilson succumbed last night to the effects of a chill contracted upon his voyage from England, which settled upon his lungs. He was conscious to the end; and made a will bequeathing the whole of the large fortune just inherited from his uncle to you. The amount of the fortune is, in rough numbers, a million pounds sterling.

"Awaiting your further instructions, we have the honour to remain, Madam, your obedient servants,

"HIGGINS AND VANDERLOW."

CHAPTER I

A VILLAGE DORCAS MEETING

"WELL, for my part I'm sorry the old Vicar is dead," said Mrs. Peppercorn. "That he had his faults I don't deny; he wouldn't have been a man if he hadn't; and of the sort that show, too. Men can never hide their faults as women do, any more than they can hide their boots; never. He was old and fussy and pernickerty—anyone with half an eye could see that; but he never interfered with the goings-on of his parishioners; and he never preached a sermon that made you feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied with yourself, which is the sort of preaching that I can't abear."

"Oh! he was a good man," exclaimed enthusiastic little Miss Tovey; "a man with a clean heart and an engaging manner; and the most beautiful complexion for his age that I've ever seen."

But Mrs. Peppercorn would not allow an unmarried woman to give her opinion upon a man in this way; it was altogether out of her province.

"As to his heart, Amelia Tovey, you know nothing at all about it. Nobody sees what's in a man's heart except his wife and his Maker; and I doubt they find it advisable to overlook a good deal that they see, or there'd never be no peace nowhere. And as to his complexion, it was as God made it; and no credit to himself at all."

"Still a good complexion is a fine thing," said Mrs. Paicey, who was always bent on seeking peace and ensuing it. "See what a beautiful one you have yourself, Mrs. Peppercorn."

"The gift of God, coupled with the use of soap and water," retorted the owner of the said complexion; "and no excuse for pride and vainglory on my part whatsoever."

"What I am always feelin' is not so much regret for the Reverend Hanson, since he had his faults as Mrs. Peppercorn has just passed the remark; but I'm full o' fear as to who will come after him," said Mrs. Mawer with a loud sigh and a strong Mershire accent. "Mark my words; every change is bound to be a change for the worse; and I've never known it to be otherwise."

"Come, come, Mrs. Mawer," said Mrs. Paicey in an encouraging voice; "you do take a gloomy view of things, to be sure!"

"If you'd ha' lived my life you'd take my views," retorted Mrs. Mawer; "but I'm not one to thrust 'em upon others against their will. Far from it. I may not say it, but I shall always think it, that this world is a wilderness o' care. And you can't see it different whichever way you look at it; and it's cryin' Peace when there is no peace to pretend as it's anythink different."

"That's all nonsense!" cried Mrs. Peppercorn. "I've lived in the world for nearly sixty years, and I've come across no wilderness of care."

Mrs. Mawer sighed again louder than ever, as loud as the furnaces of her native Black Country. It was surprising that such deep and continuous sighing did not turn her giddy! She came from that weird and wonderful land of smoke and fire which lies to the south-east of Silverhampton; and to such as knew the language of Mershire, her speech betrayed her.

"You weren't married to Mawer," she replied.

This seemed irrefutable; but Mrs. Peppercorn was equal to it. "I'd more sense."

It was the occasion of the weekly Dorcas meeting in the parish of Dinglewood; which parish had just lately

been deprived by death of the Vicar who had had charge of it for a quarter of a century. Every Monday afternoon a select company of matrons and maids resident in Dinglewood met together, in Mrs. Peppercorn's roomy parlour, to make garments for the poor, and at the same time to discuss at some length the affairs of the parish.

They were a fairly typical group of village women. There was Mrs. Peppercorn, the stout, sensible, well-to-do farmer's wife—a power in the place and a terror to evil-doers; and Mrs. Mawer, the depressed and the depressing relict of the late postmaster; and Mrs. Paicey, the comely spouse of a market-gardener; and Miss Skinner of the Post Office, who had known better (and younger) days, and prided herself upon her advanced opinions; and little Miss Tovey, the dressmaker, who had kept her heart of seventeen through thrice seventeen summers.

"Well, I do hope the new Parson, whoever he may be, will be affable and friendly-like, and as kindly as the late Vicar," remarked Mrs. Paicey. "I suppose that it's Miss Fallowfield as will have the settling of it, as it were; and she is a sensible sort of lady, as you might say."

"For an old maid she is," emended Mrs. Peppercorn; "but you can't get the same sense out of an old maid as you can out of a married woman, and it is no use expecting it." Mrs. Peppercorn cherished a profound contempt for all single women—a contempt which was but slightly modified with respect to married women who had no family; and which was hardly modified at all with regard to married women with families, who had not succeeded in "settling" their daughters. She herself had married young, had had a healthy and numerous progeny, and had seen all her daughters (there were five of them) comfortably married. Therefore, there was no blot on her matronly escutcheon, and she felt herself in a position openly to scorn and condemn all less successful wives and mothers.

"Isn't it wonderful," exclaimed Miss Tovey with a flutter of excitement, "to think of a mere woman having the power to settle who the clergyman of a parish shall be? It seems to me almost too great an honour for a woman; almost as if she were putting herself in the place of God!"

Here Miss Skinner thrust in her oar. "I never approve of private patronage myself; it is a most unfair advantage of the rich over the poor."

"I know what I think," remarked the hostess oracularly; "and those who live longest will see how true it is."

"And what is that, Mrs. Peppercorn? Pray give it a name," entreated Miss Tovey.

"Yes, do, Mrs. Peppercorn," cried Mrs. Paicey.

The oracle acceded to these requests. "It is my opinion—which you can take for what it's worth, and them as don't value it can leave it alone—that Mrs. Sprott intends to get the living of Dinglewood for her precious son, Theophilus."

At this there was a perfect chorus.

"You don't say so, Mrs. Peppercorn!"

"Surely you are mistaken!"

"Well, I never in all my life!"

"That would be a pretty kettle of fish!"

"Well, to be sure, that is the uptake!"

"You needn't believe me," replied Mrs. Peppercorn; "nobody need believe me that doesn't want to; but unless I'm very much mistaken, that is Mrs. Sprott's little game. And all I can say is that if she gets her way, I shall join the chapel-folk; for I wouldn't sit under a son of Mrs. Sprott's—no, not if you was to crown me!"

Here Miss Skinner again took up her parable. "Ah! now you see the evil of private patronage. Why should Miss Fallowfield have the power to set a man over this parish that we all dislike? I call it scandalous!"

"So do I, Miss Skinner," agreed Mrs. Mawer. "And if we don't dislike him at the beginnin' we are sure to come to it in the end, the world bein' what it is, and no peace for the wicked."

"When you come to that," continued the postmistress, who was now mounted on her favourite hobby-horse, "why should Miss Fallowfield be so rich and I so poor? why should she be rolling in luxury while I have to toil for my daily bread?"

"And why should you be able to earn a living for yourself while others are dying of starvation?" inquired Mrs. Peppercorn.

This counter-attack somewhat nonplussed Miss Skinner. "I don't know, I'm sure."

"Neither do I," continued the redoubtable Peppercorn: "I've often wondered."

"I believe Miss Fallowfield is very, very rich," exclaimed the little dressmaker; "I've heard it said that she has a million of money!"

"And I call it a great shame for a fortune like that to be given to one woman," quoth the revolutionary postmistress. "I don't wish to speak irreverently, but I sometimes find it difficult to reconcile the enormous fortunes which the Almighty bestows upon certain quite unworthy persons with my idea of justice."

"Well," replied the hostess, "He didn't make that mistake in your case, Emma Skinner, so you needn't be led into free-thinking on that score."

"Mrs. Sprott is late this afternoon," remarked the gentle Mrs. Paicey.

"And no wonder," retorted Mrs. Peppercorn; "you'd be late if you were so busy attending to other people's affairs that you hadn't time to look after your own. Not that I've any cause to grumble, however; for the later she is, the better I'm pleased; and I should be most pleased

of all if she didn't come till the Dorcas meeting was over."

"I wish she hadn't introduced this custom of reading aloud at the Dorcas," sighed Mrs. Paicey; "it seems to confuse you and take your mind off your work, as it were. I haven't the mind to take in a gusset and a history-book at once, and I don't pretend to it; but I used to enjoy the bit of talk at the Dorcas more than anything; that and Mrs. Peppercorn's tea," she added politely. "I'm always one more for talk than reading; you seem to get so much more information out of it, as you might say."

"Reading is the only recreation for cultured spirits," said Miss Skinner; "I dote upon it myself."

Little Miss Tovey agreed with her. She was one of those clinging spirits who always agree with everybody. "It is indeed, Miss Skinner, dear; and so delightful to lose oneself in an imaginary world."

"I was not referring to the perusal of novels when I remarked that I doted upon reading. I meant something more broadening to the mind than mere fiction. Though I must admit that there is much to be learnt from the modern novel, which as a rule grapples with a problem instead of merely telling a story as its benighted predecessors used to do. Yes; there is much that is broadening in the modern novel."

"There is often too much that is too broad," said Mrs. Peppercorn; "judging from what I've seen my girls get out of the circulating libraries."

"Still it opens the mind of the reader."

"So it does, Miss Skinner; and to a good deal that had better have been left shut."

"The worst of reading aloud at a Dorcas meeting," remarked Miss Tovey, "is that as a rule it makes you cry so that you can't see to thread your needle; and that seems to waste time so. Yet I do feel it wouldn't be right

to read a story at a Dorcas that didn't make you cry; it would seem almost like Sabbath-breaking."

"Why not read aloud a book that will make you laugh?" suggested the advanced Miss Skinner.

But this was too much for gentle Mrs. Paicey. "Oh, no, Miss Skinner; surely not at a sewing-party, which is almost a religious service, as you might say."

"But you would talk about things that would make you laugh at a sewing-party; so why not read about them?"

"Because talking and reading are quite different, Emma Skinner," Mrs. Peppercorn hastened to explain. "For instance, I see no harm in Peppercorn's talking a bit of politics on a Sunday, as long as he don't expect me to listen to such rubbish—none at all. But if I caught him reading a newspaper on a Sunday—my word! I'd pop it behind the fire in pretty quick time, and give him a word of a sort into the bargain."

"But a sewing-party is not a Sunday," objected Miss Skinner.

"Perhaps not, exactly," replied Mrs. Paicey; "but it is something of the same nature, as you might say."

But here Mrs. Peppercorn pronounced judgment. "I quite agree with Mrs. Sprott that a Dorcas meeting is not the place for gossip; as a matter of fact, I don't know what place is, for gossip is a thing which I don't approve of and it is no use pretending that I do. But a bit of pleasant chat is quite a different matter, and does one a lot more good than those dry old books that Mrs. Sprott is so fond of ramming down our throats."

"Mrs. Tibbets used to gossip something awful at the sewing-parties last winter, as it were," remarked Mrs. Paicey.

"That she did; it quite disgusted me," said Mrs. Peppercorn.

"And me," added Mrs. Paicey.

"And Mrs. Sprott herself isn't above a bit of gossip sometimes," said Miss Skinner.

The lady of the house agreed with her with unction. "You're right there, Emma Skinner; you're right there; you never spoke a truer word in your life. And it is not always charitable gossip either. That woman is finding fault with her neighbours and putting them straight from morning till night. For my part, I don't think such behaviour is Christian; let alone right. We all know what Saint James said about the religion of those people that didn't bridle their tongues; he had no patience with it whatsoever. And it is my opinion that Mrs. Sprott was just the kind of body that Saint James had in his mind's eye when he wrote that bit."

"Her and Mrs. Tibbets," suggested Mrs. Paicey.

"Yes, Mrs. Paicey, that is so; though I still hold that Mrs. Sprott is the worst of the two. She couldn't keep clear of her neighbours' affairs, no, not if you was to crown her. And what business is it of hers what other people do or leave undone, I should like to know? I've no patience with folks who keep passing their remarks on things that don't concern them."

"No, nor have I, Mrs. Peppercorn. And as for Paicey, he can't stand it. He won't allow gossip at any price, won't Paicey. 'Mind your business,' he says, 'and leave other folks to mind theirs; and if they do anything out of the common, Mary Ann, just you tell me about it and I'll see if I can't explain it.'"

"That reminds me," Miss Tovey remarked, "that a little bird has whispered to me that Mr. Crabbe of Appletree Farm is paying his respects to Mrs. Tibbets."

The needle dropped from Mrs. Peppercorn's fingers. "You don't say so, Amelia Tovey—and his wife hardly cold in her grave yet! Well, that's the uptake of every-

thing! And Mrs. Tibbets, who has been a widow for fifteen years, and ought to know better by this time! I wonder at Mrs. Tibbets. I've a great mind to go and tell her what a fool she is making of herself."

"Some folks don't know when they are well off," sighed Mrs. Mawer.

"But they know fast enough when other people are," added Mrs. Peppercorn, "and feather their own nests accordingly."

"I think if Mr. Crabbe intends to marry again, he might have selected a more suitable life-companion than Mrs. Tibbets." Miss Skinner spoke in quite a huffy tone of voice.

Mrs. Peppercorn sniffed contemptuously. She never paid any attention to the dicta of an unmarried woman. "But he doesn't want a life-companion as it happens; a life insurance is more in his line."

"I should think the poor man must have felt terribly lonely ever since his dear wife was taken from him," Miss Tovey chimed in.

"That's just the sort of thing you would think, Amelia; and it isn't worth thinking—much less saying."

"But, Mrs. Peppercorn dear, any man—even the most callous—must miss the woman that has been his helpmeet for over thirty years."

"You didn't know Mrs. Crabbe, Amelia; that is plain."

"No, Mrs. Peppercorn, I had not that pleasure."

"Then don't talk about what you don't know, Amelia Tovey; it's a waste of time."

Poor Miss Tovey bit her thread in humiliated silence, and subsided.

"I must tell Paicey about this; he'll be rare and interested-like, will Paicey. Over and over again he has said to me, 'Mary Ann,' says he, 'mark my words: some designing man will get hold of that old gossiping fool for her

money, and she'll talk his hind legs off and leave her savings to her own people in the end.' Oh! but he can't stand gossip at any price, can't Paicey, and Mrs. Tibbets is fairly more than he can stomach." And Mrs. Paicey purred with pleasure at having so delectable a piece of news wherewith to regale her lord and master upon her return to her own hearth.

"I can't think why Mrs. Tibbets isn't here to-day," said Mrs. Mawer; "she used to be such a regular attendant at the Dorcas. I trust she has had no bad news, nor any sudden stroke of illness that will carry her off like a flash o' lightnin'; but you never can tell, the world bein' what it is, and nothink certain but the end of all things."

"She always looks strong enough, if looks count for anything."

"So she does, Mrs. Peppercorn, so she does; but appearances are very deceptive, particularly in the case o' stout persons. I always think that stout people—such as yourself, for instance, and Mrs. Tibbets—are the first to go off if anythink ails 'em. Here to-day and gone to-morra—that's the way with them stout figures." And Mrs. Mawer sighed again like one of her native furnaces.

But Miss Skinner took a more hopeful view of the situation. "I met Mrs. Tibbets on her way to the station as I came here, and she looked all right."

At this Mrs. Mawer fairly groaned. "Looks are nothink in the case o' stout people—nothink at all. In fact, the stronger they look the sooner they're gone, and the less time for preparin' for their latter end."

Mrs. Peppercorn laid down her work that she might think the more profoundly. "I wonder what that means. There's something behind that! It isn't like Mrs. Tibbets to go to town—especially on a Monday afternoon. I must get to the bottom of this. What had she got on, Emma Skinner?"

"I didn't particularly notice; something red and yellow on her head, I think, and dark clothes. But I never am one to notice dress much; I don't go in for being fashionable." A somewhat superfluous statement on Miss Skinner's part.

"Well, I never! Her Sunday bonnet! It's the one that had carnations and lilies-of-the-valley in all the summer, and she's just had it done up and made seasonable with corn and nasturtiums. It is very unlike Mrs. Tibbets to wear her Sunday bonnet on a Monday afternoon. And when I see a Sunday bonnet on a Monday afternoon I know there's something behind it!" And Mrs. Peppercorn's face stiffened with determination to solve the mystery.

At this juncture a diversion was made by the arrival of "the quality," in the form of Mrs. Sprott and Mrs. Higginson.

Mrs. Higginson, the wife of a retired manufacturer of boots and shoes, was a thin, old-maidish-looking woman with a passion for gentility; but Mrs. Sprott, the better-half of Timothy Sprott, head clerk in the legal firm of Duncan and Somers, was of another kidney altogether. Mrs. Higginson's claim to gentility was based upon her deceased father, whom she always described as "a professional man," and referred to as "the doctor." As a matter of fact, this worthy gentleman had been a retail chemist in the days of his flesh; but those days were so remote, and his daughter's memory so imaginative, that time and filial enthusiasm had succeeded in bestowing upon him the degree of M.D. Mrs. Sprott, on the contrary, owned to no special pride of ancestry. Her claim to distinction—after the manner of the mother of the Gracchi—rested in her only child, Theophilus, who had (according to his mother's notions) secured high rank in this world and the next by taking Holy Orders. The priesthood of Theophilus had completely turned his mother's head. It

not only caused her to regard herself as on a social par with that section of society which she described as "the county;" it also led her to insist upon offering up the closing Collect at the weekly Dorcas meeting, in the absence of the Vicar; as if—in some strange and occult fashion—Apostolic Succession were retrospective, and conferred its peculiar grace upon the mothers of the clergy.

Mrs. Sprott had been abundantly baptized with an outpouring of the missionary spirit; that is to say, she regarded herself as specially called to correct the faults and redress the wrongs of her neighbours; and when the spirit of knight-errantry finds a lodging in the breast of a middle-aged female, woe-betide everybody all round! She was, moreover, an aggressive woman. Everything about her was aggressive. Her black silk dress was of that stiff, unbending nature, which seems specially ordained to stand alone; her black velveteen mantle was trimmed with a fringe of bugles, which made a noise when she moved like the muttering of trees before a storm; and her bonnet was ablaze with purple roses and yellow forget-me-nots, thereby teaching Nature a lesson as to the proper colours in which these flowers ought originally to have been designed.

"I fear we are rather late," exclaimed this excellent woman as she sat down in her accustomed place, and unfastened the bundle of unbleached calico wherein her own particular chemise was enshrined. "But I was hindered by having to call at Mrs. Barker's on the way to superintend the food that she is giving to her youngest child."

"Not at all, not at all," replied the hostess with dangerous suavity; "you are in good time for tea, Mrs. Sprott, very good time." There was chronic warfare between Mrs. Sprott and the house of Peppercorn.

"Talking of children reminds me," continued Mrs. Sprott, "that your baby is looking very ill, Mrs. Paicey. Let me see, what age is it now?"

"Eleven months," replied Mrs. Paicey, with a quiver of maternal anguish. Yet Mrs. Sprott—to do her justice—had no intention of being deliberately cruel; she merely wished to prove to Mrs. Paicey how much better in health the youthful Paiceys would be, if she (Mrs. Sprott) were consulted as to their upbringing.

"Eleven months; and it looks more like a baby of eleven weeks! What do you feed it upon?"

"Mellin's Food. Ever since I left off nursing him myself he has seemed to take to Mellin's Food, as it were, and to digest it."

"I don't approve of Mellin's Food. I brought up my Theophilus on tops-and-bottoms."

"So I should suppose from the looks of him," interjected Mrs. Peppercorn.

Mrs. Sprott felt that there was battle in the air, though she could not lay her finger upon it. Mrs. Peppercorn had said nothing, in so many words, derogatory to tops-and-bottoms; yet there was something in the tone of her voice which gave the impression that she did not regard them as a desirable food.

"I do not catch your meaning, Mrs. Peppercorn."

"Nothing to catch, Mrs. Sprott, I'm sure. You tell us that Mr. Theophilus was brought up on tops-and-bottoms, and I pass the remark that he looks like it. And if he looks like what he is, there's surely nothing to be surprised at in that. It would be more surprising if it was the other way."

Again Mrs. Sprott scented battle; and this time she took refuge in flight. "Has anyone begun the reading aloud?" she asked.

"Not that I've noticed," the hostess replied; "but then I'm not one to attend much to reading aloud, I admit."

"But, Mrs. Peppercorn, how often have I tried to con-

vince you that it is far better to try and improve our minds by reading aloud an instructive book at the sewing-parties, than to waste our time in ill-natured and foolish gossip ?"

"By all means, Mrs. Sprott ; and if you feel tempted that way, you do right to close your lips, so to speak, by reading aloud. But ill-natured and foolish gossip is no temptation to me, and it is no use my pretending that it is."

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Peppercorn," Mrs. Sprott continued, "you must see that even harmless and thoughtless conversation may speedily degenerate into gossip if it is not held in check."

"Certainly—with some people."

"When we get into the habit of not thinking before we speak, it is remarkable how many unwise and unkind things we say—and without any intention of being unwise or unkind either," said the village Mentor.

"All the same," persisted Mrs. Peppercorn, "it's a mistake to get into the habit of thinking before you speak ; it nearly always ends in leaving something unsaid, which it would have done somebody a power of good to hear."

Poor Mrs. Paicey took no part in this discussion ; all the life had been taken out of her by Mrs. Sprott's remark about her baby. But Mrs. Higginson joined in ; "Surely, Mrs. Peppercorn, there are occasions when it is better to think before one speaks—say, when one is angry, for instance, and one's equanimity is ruffled. You would never scold anyone when you were in a temper, would you ?"

"Always ; it's the time when I scold best. I don't think of half such good things to say when I've cooled down a bit. Why, if I didn't scold Peppercorn in the very nick of time when I'm put out with him, I get thinking what a well-set-up man he is, and what a pleasant face he's got, and all sorts of soft thoughts, till in the end he doesn't get scolded at all."

"'It is far better to try and improve our minds by reading aloud'" (*see page 32*).

"And think what a good thing that is, Mrs. Peppercorn dear," murmured Miss Tovey.

"Excuse me, Amelia, but you haven't been married to Peppercorn these five-and-thirty years; I have."

Here Mrs. Mawer indulged in a stupendous sigh. "It was all very well, Mrs. Peppercorn, while your husband was young—very well indeed; but when folks get to his age you never know that you may'n't be speakin' to 'em for the last time, those big, fine men gettin' carried off so sudden-like, just when they seem at their best. And then how sad for the last words between you to be words of anger, which can never be unspoken as long as you live!"

"I think perhaps I had better begin the reading aloud," remarked Mrs. Sprott, laying down her sewing and taking a book out of her hand-bag. "I have brought the *History of the Prayer-Book* to read to you this time, as last week we finished the *Lives of the Minor Prophets*. I feel sure you will all be interested to learn how our beloved Prayer-Book was originally composed."

Mrs. Peppercorn shook her head with decision. "I never care to know how things are made—never. I remember once seeing how chocolate was made at an Exhibition, and I've never been able to touch the filthy stuff since."

"But surely, Mrs. Peppercorn," Mrs. Sprott persisted, "our dear Prayer-Book is quite a different thing from mere chocolate. You must feel an interest in its history—and you the wife of a churchwarden! I consider the Prayer-Book the backbone of our English Church."

This stiffened Mrs. Peppercorn's own backbone more than ever. It never failed to exasperate her when Mrs. Sprott—by right of a vested interest in Theophilus—spoke of the Church as her private preserve. "It may be the backbone of the English Church," she retorted, "but that's no reason that I can see for wanting to know how it was made. For

my part I consider the clergy the backbone of the English Church, and I respect them accordingly, and some more than others ; but I don't feel the least interest in knowing whether they were brought up on Mellin's Food or on tops-and-bottoms, and it's no use pretending that I do."

This was a master-stroke, and Mrs. Sprott felt it so. She had no retort ready, so her "bugles sang truce" (as they did in the poem), and with a preliminary shake of her mantle she opened her book.

But before she had time to begin, Miss Skinner remarked, "Talking of clergymen, I wonder who Miss Fallowfield will appoint Vicar of Dinglewood in the Reverend Hanson's place."

"And so do I," echoed Mrs. Higginson. "It is indeed a grave responsibility to select the shepherd of so large a flock as the one of which we are members. I remember my dear papa, the Doctor, used to say, 'The head of the Church in every parish is the Vicar' ; and so indeed it is." The Doctor's daughter was very much addicted to quoting the most ordinary and most obvious platitudes uttered by the departed chemist, as if they were the choicest epigrams and epitomes of wisdom.

"What this parish really wants," announced Mrs. Sprott, "is a young and vigorous man, unhampered as yet by the cares and responsibilities of married life."

"I thought as much," ejaculated the lady of the house.

"As much as what, Mrs. Peppercorn ?" Miss Tovey asked this question, in her usual thirst for information.

"That what this parish really wants is a young man with no wife and less experience," was the dark answer.

Mrs. Sprott thought fit to take this statement literally. "That is quite true, Mrs. Peppercorn, and I only trust that Miss Fallowfield will see it in the same light as we do. But when I say an unmarried man, I do not mean a man altogether unhelped by feminine influence. A successful parish

priest, even if still single, should always have a woman at his elbow—a mother or a sister—to guide and counsel him."

Again Mrs. Peppercorn apparently agreed with her enemy. "And he is bound to get them. No man with female relatives has any cause to go wrong for want of a bit of advice."

"Yes," added Mrs. Sprott, once more opening the *History of the Prayer-Book*, "what Dinglewood requires for its spiritual needs is a young and earnest unmarried clergyman, with some capable woman always at his side; a man still full of the enthusiasm and single-mindedness of youth, who has been brought up by wise and pious parents."

"Upon tops-and-bottoms," murmured Mrs. Peppercorn; but the mother of Theophilus was too wise to appear to hear her; and proceeded to delve among the foundations of the Anglican Prayer-Book until it was time for her to offer up her closing Collect and to bring the sewing-party to an end.

CHAPTER II

MISS FALLOWFIELD

On the great high-road that runs from London to Chester, straight through the heart of the Midlands, stands the village of Dinglewood.

It is a fine old road, and has seen fine old doings in its time. It has echoed to the tramp of the Roman legions as they thundered forth on their triumphant way; it has watched the knights and ladies of the Middle Ages ride by on their armed steeds and their white palfreys. Hereward the Wake made use of it as he rode home on Mare Swallow after playing the potter; and Charles the Second found it his friend when he escaped to Boscobel after the battle of Worcester. Now it no longer bears the tread of armies or guides the steps of fugitive kings: it has fallen upon more peaceful and less eventful days. Instead of Hereward the Wake seeking the merry greenwood, or Charles fleeing from the Parliamentary hosts, tired huntsmen jog along its grassy edges on wintry evenings, wanting rest after a good day's sport; instead of gay post-chaises with their postilions, or mail-coaches with their smoking teams, hay-carts rumble in summer along its broad white path, and farmers drive in their gigs to and from market; and instead of the clash of arms and the tramp of armies, its silence is now broken by the hideous trumpetings of motor-cars. Other days, other manners—sometimes better, sometimes not so good; a truth which has been well trodden into the old road—called by some the Streetway and by others the Watling Street—which runs from London

through the heart of the Midlands straight to the western sea.

We have seen that there are special voices of the forest and of the sea and of the mountain; and there is likewise the special voice of the road. As the spirit of the forest is the spirit of love, and the spirit of the sea the spirit of sorrow, and the spirit of the mountain the spirit of prayer, so the spirit of the highway is the spirit of hope. Which of us does not know the exhilaration of setting out on a broad highway, with its white path in the centre, and its strips of greensward on either side, and the unknown at the other end of it? Which of us at some time or other has not heard the call of the road sounding in our ears, bidding us journey on to "fresh woods and pastures new"? There is always something hopeful in the sight of a great highway. There is no stagnation in it, no finality. It is imbued with the spirit of progress, and is for ever urging us to forget those things which are behind, and to reach forth unto those things which are before. And the voice of the road is one of the voices of eternity; for in that country where it is decreed that the sea shall be no more, it is also ordained that a highway shall be there, which shall be called the way of holiness. Which surely teaches us that the life of the world to come shall be no formless Nirvana, no semi-conscious absorption into Infinity; but a life of service and effort and activity, the life of a great highway. And, further, it brings us a message of comfort concerning those who have gone astray from the high-roads of this world, and have wandered in forbidden paths; for on that new highway, which is called the way of holiness, travellers can press onwards to fresh duties and fresh attainments, unhampered by those temptations and infirmities of the flesh which proved too strong for them here; for of that road it is written that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.

The spirit of a place must inevitably exercise a marked influence upon the characters of the people who are born and bred in it. The inhabitants of densely wooded regions are as a rule inclined to poetry and romance ; sea-faring folk are rarely gay or light-hearted, but have a sad and far-away look in their eyes, as those who see strange and terrible wonders in the deep ; they who dwell upon mountain-tops and in the high places of the earth, are prone to ponder upon the mysteries of the Unseen even to the verge of religious melancholy ; and those whose lot is cast in the habitable parts which fringe the great highways, are generally a hopeful and progressive people, who have learnt the secret of success. It is not their way to plunge into the heart of the woodland in search of Love feeding among the lilies ; nor to fling their souls in unceasing rebellion against the hard rocks of Fate ; nor yet to stretch forth groping hands towards the Unknown God that haply they may feel after Him and find Him ; but rather to set their faces to attain the practicable and to compass the possible, unhindered by the brooding shadow of mystery or the illusive glamour of romance ; and to set their feet upon the road which leads to a known and certain goal, through low-lying hills which are gateways rather than barriers, and beside running waters which are a means rather than an end.

The spirit of the road is the prevailing spirit of Mercia, for Mercia is the land of roads, leading from north to south and from east to west. And the typical Mercian is cheerful and progressive, practical and sensible, not given to the seeing of indescribable visions nor the dreaming of impossible dreams ; but devoting his working hours to the tramping of those dusty highways which lead to professional proficiency and commercial success ; and taking his pastime in those green and grassy lanes—hidden sometimes under snowdrifts of blossom and sometimes under canopies of

fruit—which will eventually bring him to a cosy and comfortable homestead of his own.

Therefore Dinglewood being situated in the very middle of Mercia, and the spirit of Mercia being the spirit of the road, the story of Dinglewood will be no blood-curdling tale of mystery and no enthralling legend of romance; but just the ordinary, commonplace history of ordinary, commonplace people, who neither work miracles nor make angels weep; but who learn and labour truly to get their own living, and strive (with occasional lapses) to do their duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them.

And as the road through Dinglewood crosses no snow-crowned peaks and borders no unfathomable oceans, and yet has its up and downs—its low-lying hills and its fertile valleys—so the people of Dinglewood find their own romance and pathos in their ordinary and apparently uneventful lives. And we do well now and then to turn away from our search after thrilling incident and soul-stirring tragedy, to look for the real joy and sorrow of ordinary human life as we see it at our doors; lest perchance in our eagerness to do and to know some great thing, and to bathe in the Abanas and the Pharpars of dramatic emotion, we omit to cleanse our souls in the Jordan of human experience and practical heroism which is for ever flowing by our very gates.

Among the most important inhabitants of the village of Dinglewood—perhaps the most important of all, next to the Vicar, and he could hardly be called an inhabitant just now, as the late one was dead and the new one not yet appointed—was Miss Charlotte Fallowfield; a maiden lady of some forty-eight summers, who had inherited a very large fortune five-and-twenty years before this story opens; and who had then expended a portion of this fortune in purchasing Dinglewood Hall. A handsome

woman was Miss Fallowfield, with masses of black hair now streaked with grey, aquiline features, a good complexion, and dark eyes which looked as bright as they looked when they were but twenty years old, and which saw a good deal more than they saw then.

At the age of twenty-three Miss Fallowfield had come into a fortune of a million—an immense sum to be entrusted to the hands of any woman. And Charlotte had not proved herself unworthy of the trust. As is unusual in the case of persons who suddenly spring out of the depths of poverty to the heights of excessive wealth, she had become neither recklessly extravagant nor miserably parsimonious. In fact she had shown herself one of those rare people who possess a sense of proportion where money is concerned. She estimated it at its true value in the eternal scheme of things; and dealt with it accordingly.

Her position was a singularly independent and solitary one. At the time of her succeeding to this vast fortune she was an orphan with one sister, a year or two younger than herself; and until that event she and Phœbe had had a hard struggle for existence. But then everything changed. All pressing anxiety was over; and permanent comfort, if not happiness, awaited the two girls. Owing to Charlotte's generosity, Phœbe was shortly able to marry the man of her girlish choice—a handsome and impecunious curate of Irish extraction. They had one child—a daughter—whom they christened Dagmar. For a few years they lived together in a state of ideal happiness in a rural parish to which Derek Silverthorne was appointed soon after his marriage. Having private means (Charlotte's) they could afford to accept a living which would have meant absolute starvation to a man less handsomely endowed—one of those incumbencies so common, alas! in the Church of England, which prove the adherence of a great nation

to the doctrine that the labourer is *not* worthy of his hire.

Then Derek, in the fulfilment of his pastoral duties, caught a fever, which proved fatal ; and his young wife—to everyone's surprise—did not long survive him, but died a few months afterwards, nominally of a neglected cold, but actually of a broken heart. It was one of those cases wherein people do the exact opposite to that which their natures prophesy and their friends expect. Phœbe Silverthorne's was one of those happy-go-lucky characters which are supposed to resemble the proverbial duck's back. Nothing—not even poverty itself, that most depressing of companions—seemed able to affect her light-heartedness. She was the type of woman of whom people say, " If anything happened to her husband she would be bound to marry again." And therefore it was a source of amazement to everybody who knew her, to find that she was not made of such slight elements as they had imagined. It is a generally accepted though utterly erroneous article of belief that melancholy people have deeper feelings than cheerful people ; and that those who are endowed with a sense of humour have of necessity therefore been denied a sense of pathos. A woman has only to wear a sad expression of countenance and talk in a whining voice, and people give her credit for unfathomable depths of sentiment and emotion ; while her sister who goes smiling through life and irradiates cheerfulness wherever she may be, is credited with utter want of heart ; for in these days of advertisement, people have not the discernment to perceive that the difference between the melancholy woman and the cheery one is generally the difference between selfishness and unselfishness. They both have their sorrows ; they would not be human if they had not ; but the former forces her burden upon other people, while the latter sets herself to lighten theirs.

So merry Phœbe Silverthorne died from the breakage of that organ which a superficial world had not given her the credit for possessing; and little Dagmar went to live with her aunt.

In spite of her large fortune—or, rather, perhaps because of it—Charlotte Fallowfield had never married. True, she had had a disappointment in her youth, which would have constrained some women deliberately to choose a life of celibacy; but Charlotte was not one of these. She was descended from a good old Midland stock, with all the Midland characteristics; and she would have considered it an act of foolish sentiment to condemn herself to a solitary existence because poor Herbert Wilson had not lived to marry her. Had he done so, there would have been no more faithful and devoted wife in England than Charlotte; but, as she could not now make him happy, she correctly reasoned that it would be in accordance with his wishes that she should make herself as happy as she could without him; and if she had found, among her numerous lovers, one who gave her a reasonable hope of securing to her this happiness, she would straightway have accepted him. But she did not.

As a girl, Charlotte had been fairly romantic; but one of the results of great wealth—as of great poverty—is the early death of romance. The woman who is so poor that nobody wants to marry her, and the woman who is so rich that everybody wants to marry her, are both too clear-sighted to be taken in by Love's assumption of blindness. They know well enough that the bandage across the eyes of the so-called "little blind god" is all humbug; and that he can see as far into a bank-book as most people, and take aim accordingly. Therefore Miss Fallowfield was so accustomed to be proposed to by men who had not known her long enough or well enough to love her for herself, that she had lost faith in her own power of inspiring affection;

and had arrived at the melancholy conclusion that nobody cared for her except on pecuniary grounds. Yet she was a decidedly handsome woman, and would have been an attractive one had she not been embittered by her own wealth. But she was not happy; and unhappy women are very rarely charming, though they may be endowed with a certain fascination of their own. Charm is a plant which flourishes in a congenial soil and a sunny climate, and is found far oftener in the valleys of content than on the mountain-tops of distinction.

Her life had been a very lonely one since Phœbe's death, as Dagmar was still so young as to be a pet rather than a companion; and Charlotte sorely pined for the support of a guiding hand to help her in the management of her large fortune. The fact that she was quite capable of managing it herself, in no way detracted from her constant desire for advice and assistance; and she would have been lost indeed had it not been for the friendship which existed between herself and her solicitor, Mr. Duncan of Merchester. Mr. Duncan was a distant connection of her father's; and, on acceding to her fortune, Miss Fallowfield immediately sought him out—a thing she would never have dreamed of doing in the days of her poverty—and put all her affairs into his hands. It was he who told her when Dinglewood Hall was in the market and advised her to buy it, Dinglewood being situated only about five miles from Merchester; and he had been her most valued guide and counsellor ever since.

Miss Fallowfield was a very generous woman. She did not save at all; and she only spent a very moderate portion of her enormous fortune, living in the comfortable yet unobtrusive style of a well-bred Englishwoman of the upper middle-class. The remainder of her income she gave away—for the greater part anonymously, since she had the utmost horror of anything approaching ostentation

or display with regard to her wealth. She had not yet made up her mind how she could dispose of that wealth in the distant future, when she would be no longer able to dispense it herself. She had no intention of leaving it to her niece; she knew too well the care and responsibility and unhappiness which the possession of exceptional riches entails upon a woman; and she wished to save Dagmar from the disappointment and loneliness which she had herself endured. She had therefore settled a hundred thousand pounds upon the girl, and had told her plainly that was all she must expect from her aunt. The remaining nine hundred thousand pounds Miss Fallowfield intended to leave to charity; but what particular form this charity was to take she had not decided. But as she was as yet on the sunny side of fifty, she felt there was still plenty of time in which to arrive at a just and right decision: exactly as she would have felt had she been instead on the shady side of eighty.

As for the niece for whom a tithe of Miss Fallowfield's fortune was reserved, she was a very pretty girl indeed. She was tall and slender and had really golden hair—neither red nor flaxen, but of the exact shade of a sovereign—a rose-leaf complexion, and eyes the colour of sapphires. The blue eyes of Englishwomen nearly always partake of the hue of turquoise and forget-me-nots; you must cross the Irish Channel if you want to find sapphires and violets adorning the windows of a woman's soul. Dagmar was still very young, having barely outgrown her title to the epithet "sweet and twenty"; and she was quite clever enough for a girl endowed with beauty as well.

The gates of Dinglewood Park opened on to the great high-road; and the Hall was about half a mile from them, being approached by a winding drive which bordered a large sheet of water. The Hall itself was a fine old Jacobean house, built of red brick with stone facings, and

was replete with beautiful curios and works of art, as its owner was a lady of great artistic taste; and the gardens were counted among the sights of the Midlands, being thrown open to the public one day a week.

"I wish I could make up my mind what to do with regard to the living of Dinglewood," said Miss Fallowfield to her niece a few days after the Dorcas meeting. The two ladies were having tea in the cosy morning-room which opened out of the state drawing-room at the hall; and as it was autumn, the shadows of evening were beginning to close in.

"I don't see why you should be in a hurry, Aunt Charlotte. I think it's rather fun having no proper Vicar, but getting in what you might call 'a char-clergyman' to do the work every Sunday. It makes such a nice lot of variety."

"It certainly does that," agreed Miss Fallowfield with a smile.

"I think having the same old clergyman week after week gets dreadfully boring," continued Dagmar; "but if there is always a new one for every Sunday, you enjoy his first sermon because you've never heard it before, and his second because you never hear it at all."

"That is all very well for you, my dear, but what about the parish as a whole? The 'char-clergymen,' as you call them, don't do any visiting, and the poor are shockingly neglected in consequence."

Dagmar shrugged her pretty shoulders: "Oh! they don't mind that—they like it. They don't want a clergyman who is always poking his nose into their concerns, and interfering all round. What they like is one who never gives them advice till they ask for it, and then advises them to do the thing they'd already done before they asked him. As a rule, people don't ask for advice, you see, until they've done the thing that they are going

to do; and then what is the use of advising them not to do it?"

"Certainly not much."

"And the preaching that people really like," continued the sapient young judge, "is the sort that shows up their own virtues and is down on their neighbours' faults. I'm sure it is."

"Then I conclude that the preaching that you like most is that which condemns my particular faults and extols your particular virtues. Eh, little one?"

"Oh! auntie, darling, you haven't got any faults. And those that you have are the nice sort that people are much better with than without," replied the loyal Dagmar, who had not had an Irish father for nothing.

"Well, all the same, dear, I am sadly bothered about this living. I must appoint somebody soon, and I cannot make up my mind who it shall be. I wish I could see my way to giving it to Theophilus Sprott." And Miss Fallowfield sighed.

Dagmar put down her tea-cup with a gasp of horror. "Oh, auntie! Not that terrible Theophilus?"

"Yes, that terrible Theophilus, my dearest. Have you anything against him?"

"Why, he's the very ugliest man I ever saw in my life! I've only seen one uglier, and that was Mr. Hanson, and I'm not sure that he was really quite so ugly after all. And then he is so dreadfully old!"

"He is forty-one," remarked Miss Fallowfield demurely.

"Ah! I knew he was a great age," retorted Dagmar in all good faith; "and it does seem such a pity to begin with another old man just when we've got rid of Mr. Hanson so nicely. Oh! auntie, do get somebody young and good-looking and nice; it would make going to Church so much more amusing."

"You do not go to Church to be amused, Dagmar," said Miss Fallowfield with outward gravity and inward humour.

"But if you are amused, you are much more likely to go again; and that is a good thing; and if people are bored the first time they go to hear a man, they don't go at all, you see, and that is the end of their church-going."

"I am very sorry for Theophilus Sprott," continued Miss Fallowfield, following her own train of thought: "here he is at forty-one, with nothing but a curacy. It is time that he had a parish of his own. I cannot make out why he has not got on better, as he was considered very promising as a young man. He used to be the head boy, I believe, of Merchester Grammar School; and then he went to S. Monica's College, Oxford. He must have had a good head in those days."

"But he must always have had a dreadful face."

"He couldn't help his face, Dagmar."

"Well, he couldn't help his head either, if you come to that."

Miss Fallowfield laughed; "I suppose he couldn't; but it always seems more to be people's own doing, somehow, if they are clever than if they are good-looking."

"I know; and it's so dreadfully unjust. The clever girls at school were always being praised for their cleverness, as if they had done it themselves; while we pretty ones were always being told we must remember that we were as God made us; which used to hurt our feelings dreadfully."

"But why, darling? It was quite true."

"I know it was; and that was what vexed us so. We wouldn't have minded if Miss Perkins had admitted that God made the clever girls as well. But she never did. She always buttered them up as if they'd made themselves and it was entirely their own doing."

"Well, anyway, Theophilus Sprott's face isn't his own

doing, and I don't see why I should punish him further for it. And I am sorry for him. He began his career with so much promise and it has all come to nothing. I am always sorry for disappointed people, as I am a disappointed woman myself."

"People generally wouldn't think so," Dagmar expostulated.

"Probably not; they generally think wrongly. There are two kinds of disappointed people, my child—the people who have failed to attain their heart's desire, and the people who have succeeded in getting it; and the latter are the more to be pitied of the two."

"Still," persisted Dagmar, "it can't matter much when you get to Theophilus Sprott's age what happens to you; you must feel that your life is over and that nothing can make much difference any more. So it does seem such a pity to throw away that nice Church and Vicarage upon a man whose life is practically over, when it would make a nice young one so tremendously happy and comfortable."

"That argument certainly is a convincing one, and I'll give it my full consideration," answered Miss Fallowfield; and it was now so very dark that Dagmar could not see that her aunt was laughing at her.

CHAPTER III

DUNCAN AND SOMERS

DUNCAN and Somers had for several generations been the leading solicitors in Merchester; but now the firm was represented by Mr. Reginald Duncan, as the Somers of the present day was an old man of over eighty; and the grandson who was eventually to succeed to his share in the concern—young Alan Wylie—had not as yet emerged from the chrysalis of articled clerkship.

Therefore the business was carried on for the present by Reginald Duncan and his head clerk, Mr. Sprott. Mr. Sprott had entered the service of Duncan and Somers as an office-boy fifty years before; and had remained in that office ever since, having "slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent" until he was now Mr. Duncan's right-hand man.

Reginald Duncan was a distinguished-looking man of about fifty-five. He was both gifted and cultured; and his wide experience had not left him much to learn about human nature and its manifold frailties. He was a bachelor, and seemed likely to remain so, although he had had his romance like the rest of us; his particular romance being Charlotte Fallowfield.

When first Charlotte sought out her father's distant cousin and put her business affairs into his hands, Reginald fell in love with her as single-heartedly and completely as if she had not had a penny in the world. But he was not as ready to inform her of the fact as he would have been in these circumstances; and hence arose the crowning

mistake of his otherwise prosperous and sensible career. He was too proud to make love to a woman with such an enormous fortune as Charlotte Fallowfield; and so offered up her happiness and his own upon the altar of his pride. Charlotte and he were thoroughly suited to each other, and would have been unusually qualified to make one another happy. But because she was enormously rich and he was only moderately so, Reginald decreed that they must both forego the bliss of an absolutely sympathetic union, and be content to dree out their weirds alone; for the which most men and no woman would commend him.

But although Mr. Duncan lived alone in a fine old oak-panelled house on the outskirts of Merchester, his solitude was not altogether unbroken; for he had a frequent visitor in the shape of his nephew, Octavius Rainbrow—a young gentleman who loomed very large in the eyes of Miss Dagmar Silverthorne. Now Octavius was a very great man indeed—in his own eyes as well as in those of Miss Silverthorne; and he was as yet sufficiently young to be infallible upon every matter, whether he knew anything about it or whether he did not. In fact the less he knew, the more infallible he was; which is one of the glorious prerogatives of youth. And he was also in love with Miss Silverthorne, although he was sufficiently cautious not to mention the fact until his position was a little more established; wherein he showed himself his uncle's nephew. He had declined, however, to enter the prosaic if respectable ranks of that uncle's profession, and had selected journalism as the most agreeable road to that ultimate success which he had no doubt was awaiting him. He was the second child of his parents and was christened Octavius, which gave the impression to a casual acquaintance that Mr. and Mrs. Rainbrow were somewhat shaky in their arithmetic. But in reality this was not so.

Octavius was named after a great-uncle on his father's side, from whom he had what people call "expectations," and who had been in very truth the eighth arrow in that particular quiverful of Rainbrows.

It was marvellous to hear Octavius talk upon matters about which he knew absolutely nothing; and such conversation aroused equally Miss Silverthorne's admiration and his uncle's amusement. At present he was on the staff of the *Morning Sunset*, and devoted his wonderful abilities to correcting and refining public taste upon such matters as art, literature, and the like. He cherished rather a contempt for what he called the "newsy" parts of the paper; his line was to go round the country reading novels, seeing plays, and attending musical festivals, and then to teach the public how to regard the same from the truly artistic (that is to say his own particular) point of view. All modern novelists he utterly despised, and most ancient ones; but he had been known to speak tolerantly —even kindly—of Balzac, whom however he was unable to study in the original, owing to that author's unfortunate habit of writing his novels in French. According to Octavius, there never had been but one musician in the world since Tubal Cain; and that was Wagner. Handel he scorned as "stodgy" and Mendelssohn as "tuney"; while as for Beethoven and Bach, if he recognised their compositions at all (which he never could do without a programme), he condemned them wholesale as "out of date." It was no wonder that little Dagmar Silverthorne regarded him as the cleverest man she had ever met in her whole life; and especially as he wore a single eye-glass, which never fails to impress the feminine mind. Mr. Rainbrow could not see through his eye-glass, it is true; but his sight was so excellent that he could well afford to sacrifice the vision of one eye now and then for the sake of effect.

But the most popular person in Duncan and Somers' office was neither Mr. Duncan nor Mr. Somers—nor yet Mr. Alan Wylie; it was the managing clerk, Timothy Sprott.

Mr. Sprott was a small, stout, cherubic-looking person, with white hair, rosy cheeks, and the kindest heart in the world. For a long time now he had lived in a small house at Dinglewood, coming up to Merchester every morning by the 8.45 train, and returning home every evening by the 5.23, as regularly as clock-work; and he was a capable and efficient man of business, as well as a most faithful and affectionate friend. He had, however, with his many excellencies, one noteworthy weakness; and that was the glamour of romance which he threw retrospectively around his own words and actions. To hear Mr. Sprott's actual contributions to any conversation, and then to hear the worthy little man's account of the same, was in itself a liberal education in the art of dramatic fiction. To listen to what Mr. Sprott said that he had said, filled the listener with wonder that so much courage and wisdom should be combined in one personality; but to listen to what Mr. Sprott really had said—well, the effect was hardly the same! And the funny part of it was that he himself believed every word that he uttered when he described the event.

As Mr. Sprott possessed one weakness in his otherwise flawless character, so he had made one mistake in his otherwise blameless career. In this he resembled his master. But Mr. Duncan's folly in not having married Miss Fallowfield was as nothing compared with Mr. Sprott's folly in having married Mrs. Sprott; the one error being remedial, and the other not. Everybody wondered why Mr. Sprott had married his Susanna—and nobody wondered more than he did; the fact of the matter being that in reality Mrs. Sprott had married him.

One child was the result of this union—the Reverend Theophilus. Mrs. Sprott always explained that she christened her son Theophilus because he was the gift of God. That in that case she ought to have called him Theodore, was a minor matter, and none of her lady friends was sufficiently erudite to notice the mistake; but what they did notice—and resent—was her tone of voice in announcing this truth, which seemed to imply that while Theophilus was a Heaven-sent blessing, the babies of other matrons had been bestowed by an inferior and less beneficent Power.

Theophilus had been an intelligent, priggish little boy in spectacles; and he grew up into a disagreeable, melancholy young man. He did well at the Merchester Grammar School; so well that Mr. Duncan gave him a scholarship at S. Monica's College, Oxford, the presentation to which was vested in the Duncan family. True, Mr. Duncan showed this favour to Theophilus chiefly for Timothy's sake; but he also believed that the boy would distinguish himself at Oxford as he had done at school. Here, however, the solicitor was disappointed. Theophilus took a pass degree, but that was all; after which he became a clergyman, and since that time had been working as a curate at S. Mark's Church, Merchester, waiting for preferment that never came; which delay was a problem that sometimes staggered the faith —though never the self-confidence—of both Theophilus and his mother.

At the time when this story opens, Timothy Sprott was unhappy—very unhappy indeed—owing to the fact that it had been borne in upon his better-half, that her son was the person selected by Providence and by the general fitness of things to succeed Mr. Hanson as Vicar of Dinglewood. Since Providence and the general fitness of things had—according to Mrs. Sprott—fixed upon Theophilus,

there was now only one person's consent needed to conclude the transaction, namely Miss Charlotte Fallowfield's; and Mrs. Sprott believed, and did not hesitate to express this belief, that it was Timothy's duty to point out to the patroness of the living her providential path. Now it happened that when the fairies presided some sixty years before over the christening of Timothy Sprott, among their numerous gifts—such as perseverance, amiability, unselfishness, cheerfulness, and the like, which they abundantly bestowed—they omitted to include that valuable attribute commonly known as "push," from the lack of which poor Timothy had suffered ever since. He could deserve good things by his merits, or attain them by his efforts; but ask for them from other people, he neither could nor would. Mrs. Sprott, on the contrary, suffered from no such diffidence; she could, and would, and usually did; and if she did not (owing to lack of opportunity), she never ceased to urge her reluctant spouse to do the thing which his innocent soul abhorred. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Sprott were frequently in the position when "those behind cried 'Forward!' And those before cried 'Back!'"—a position always specially uncomfortable for the vanguard, as poor Timothy had discovered.

On the present occasion Mrs. Sprott gave her husband no rest night or day, but continually commanded him to ask Mr. Duncan to advise Miss Fallowfield to bestow upon Theophilus the living of Dinglewood. Every morning Mr. Sprott caught the 8.45 with a heavy heart, feeling that he should have to put his pride in his pocket, and his courage in both hands, and ask this favour of his chief ere that day's sun had set; and every evening he caught the 5.23 with a still heavier one, knowing that he should have to confess to his wife that her behest was as yet unfulfilled.

It was when "I dare not" had waited on "I would" for several weeks in the soul of Timothy Sprott, that one

afternoon Mr. Duncan summoned his head clerk into his room.

"By the way, Sprott, do you happen to know whether Miss Fallowfield has taken any steps yet towards filling up the vacant living of Dinglewood?" he began.

"No, sir, no; not that I know of, that is to say." Timothy was always very humble in the presence of Mr. Duncan. The office-boy in his nature woke up, metaphorically speaking, and touched its hat, when he stood before one of the partners; for the thought of his past years bred perpetual benediction in the soul of Timothy Sprott upon the firm of Duncan and Somers. The fairies, who carelessly forgot to give him push, had generously endowed Mr. Sprott with that finer and rarer quality known as gratitude.

"Well," continued Mr. Duncan, "it is time that she did something, or else she will lose the presentation altogether, and it will lapse into the hands of the Bishop."

"Yes, yes, sir; that is so, that is so. Six months is, I believe, the limit prescribed by law."

"It has occurred to me, Sprott, that she could not do better than give your son the living of Dinglewood. He is a young man of parts, Sprott—distinctly a young man of parts, and his career has been a blameless record of indefatigable—and up to now unrecognized—industry."

Mr. Sprott flushed still pinker than his wont, and his light blue eyes filled with tears of joy at this tribute to his son from the being whom he most revered on earth. "Thank you, sir; thank you more than I can say. You, sir, and your father before you, have been the kindest friends to me and mine that surely man ever had; and as long as I live I shall never forget your kindness—never."

"Tut, tut, Sprott, you make too much of what we have done for you; you do, indeed! And certainly I can

adapt your remark, and say that you in return have been the most loyal and most faithful servant to us and to the firm that man ever had."

By this time Timothy was so overcome by joy and pride that he was past speaking, and could only blow his nose; so Mr. Duncan went on: "I shall make it a point to suggest to Miss Fallowfield that she could not do better than appoint your son to fill the vacant incumbency. As I said before, he is a young man—and a University man, mark you—of decided parts and of blameless character; in addition to this he is a native of the neighbourhood and knows all the ins-and-outs of everything and everybody, which I consider a most necessary qualification in the Vicar of a country parish; and—which is most important of all—his views are decidedly moderate, not to say Broad. Is that not so, Sprott?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

"No Ritualistic nonsense about him, eh, Sprott?"

"None at all, sir, none at all."

"No leanings towards Rome or Popery?"

"Far from it, sir, far from it. His mother wouldn't allow such a thing for a moment."

"Then don't you think yourself, Sprott, that he would be the very man for the place?"

"Well, sir, it had occurred to me—that is to say Mrs. Sprott had mentioned it——"

"Quite so, Sprott, quite so; I admire and appreciate a mother's natural anxiety upon the subject; and I shall make a point of either seeing or writing to Miss Fallowfield upon the matter without further loss of time. Good day, good day. I must not keep you longer or you will lose your train."

The voice of thanksgiving bade Mr. Sprott fall on his knees before his benefactor and strive to give utterance to some small portion of the gratitude he felt; but the voice

of habit and the 5.23 called still louder; and Timothy responded to the latter call and fled.

When he arrived at home he found that Theophilus and Mr. and Mrs. Higginson had dropped in to partake of that meal which in the north of England is known as "a high tea," but in the Midlands as "tea with something with it." When first Theophilus took Holy Orders, Mrs. Sprott had insisted upon dining late; but as this unusual arrangement upset both her servant's temper and her husband's digestion, the good lady soon reverted to her primitive custom of a midday dinner and "tea with something with it." The "something" on this particular occasion happened to be mutton-chops.

"What delicious mutton-chops you have given us, if you will excuse my remarking upon them!" exclaimed Mrs. Higginson, when they had duly taken their places at table and begun the meal.

Mrs. Higginson always inserted an apology in her conversation whenever she could find room for one; it was her idea of good manners.

"Capital!" echoed her lord and master. "So tender and juicy!"

"The reason for that," explained the hostess, "is that I do not buy chops straight from the butcher as you do, Mrs. Higginson, which is a great mistake as well as a piece of extravagance. I always purchase a large portion of the animal at a time, and divide it myself into smaller joints."

"Ah! my love, you are an excellent housekeeper," murmured Mr. Sprott, as clearly as a mouth full of mutton-chop would permit. "We do not often see your like, do we, Sam?" he added, appealing to his guest.

"No, we don't," replied Mr. Higginson, in a tone of voice which left it doubtful whether he considered this limitation of vision a calamity or the reverse.

"The chops which you are now eating," continued Mrs. Sprott, "I cut myself off my own loin. It came much cheaper than getting them from the butcher." Doubtless it did; but the ambiguity of the good lady's mode of expressing herself made it seem even more economical than it really was. However, the suggestion of cannibalism conveyed by her remark passed unnoticed by her companions.

"The remainder of the loin," she added, "will be served up as our Sunday dinner."

"And a great treat it will be, my love—a great treat!" ejaculated the ever-thankful Timothy.

"We had mutton-chops at home to-day, Mrs. Sprott, for lunch," said Mrs. Higginson; "and I must own, if you will pardon me saying so, that they were very inferior to yours."

"Ah! you procured them as chops straight from the butcher; and as long as you do that you will purchase inferior meat and it will cost you more." Mrs. Sprott never failed in her self-imposed duty to put other people straight.

"Lor, Matilda, why don't you call your dinner, your dinner, when it is your dinner? What's the good of gassing about lunch?" asked Mr. Higginson.

"Because, Samuel, as I have often pointed out to you, it is in little things like this that good breeding is shown. To call dinner lunch, and chapel church, does so add to the finish and refinement of life, and yet costs nothing." The Higginsons were Nonconformists; Mr. owing to conscientious conviction, and Mrs. owing to conjugal compulsion.

"In the same way," continued Mrs. Higginson with a sigh, "I do wish you would not persist in calling me Matilda."

"Why not? It's your name. And if a fellow can't

call his own wife by her own name, what can he call her by, I should like to know ?"

"I so much prefer to be called by the French form of the name, which is Maude. If you read English history, Samuel, you will perceive that the Empress Matilda usually called herself Maud ; and if an Empress could do it, why not I ?"

"I know nothing about the habits of Empresses," retorted Mr. Higginson with some truth.

But here Mrs. Sprott began to talk about her own affairs. She rarely let so long an interval as this pass without doing so. "Well, Timothy, and have you seen Mr. Duncan to-day and spoken to him about Theophilus and the living of Dinglewood ?" There was no secrecy between the Higginsons and the Sprotts. Mrs. Sprott's ambitions for Theophilus were as an open book to the Higginsons.

"It will be no use if he has," interjected Theophilus in a gloomy voice ; "my usual ill-luck will prevent me from getting anything worth having, whatever my father may say or may not say. It has always appeared to me, Mr. Higginson—and I fancy that I have some classical authority for the idea—that a malign fate dogs the footsteps of certain people. Whatever they do—even from the best of motives—turns out to their own disadvantage ; whatever they desire—though it be but an innocent and even laudable ambition—is invariably denied them. I am one of those unfortunate persons myself, Mr. Higginson."

"Liver," replied Mr. Higginson. Though a man of few words, they were generally to the point.

But his better-half was more loquacious. "I am well aware of what you mean, Theophilus. Ill-luck not only pursues individuals, it runs in families. My own family—the Fitzwilkinses—were always an ill-starred house." Mrs. Higginson's maiden name had really been Wilkinson ;

in fact the departed chemist had answered to the name of Wilkinson as long as he answered to anything at all; but since his death and subsequent elevation to the rank of Doctor, his daughter had changed the name to Fitzwilkins—which, she explained, had exactly the same meaning and a much more aristocratic sound. In the early days of her married life she had urged her husband to call himself Fitzhiggin on a similar principle; but Samuel expressed himself so strongly on the point that she soon desisted.

Here Mrs. Sprott repeated her question in a somewhat louder tone of voice. "Have you spoken to Mr. Duncan to-day, Timothy, about Theophilus and the living of Dinglewood?"

Mr. Sprott rubbed his hands together in sheer ecstasy at being able to answer in the affirmative at last. "Yes, my love, I have, I have. I have spoken quite plainly and firmly to Mr. Duncan upon the subject; and I hope—I may say I think—that my words will bear fruit. It is not often that I rouse myself, but when I do, I do."

"It is no use anyone rousing himself on my behalf, I fear," sighed the curate of S. Mark's; "my ill-luck will be too much for him, whatever he may try to do for me."

"What did you say to Mr. Duncan, Timothy?" demanded Mrs. Sprott. "Empty your mouth and then tell us all about it."

Thus adjured, Mr. Sprott set himself to tell his tale; and the strange thing was that he firmly believed all the time that he was giving an absolutely literal and correct account of what had occurred between himself and his chief.

"Well, my dear, I happened to be in Mr. Duncan's room this afternoon, so I remarked, 'Mr. Duncan, may I embrace this opportunity of saying a word or two to you

upon a little business of my own ?' 'Certainly, Sprott, certainly,' said he ; he is a very affable gentleman is Mr. Reginald—always has been since a boy."

"And what did you say ?" asked Mrs. Sprott.

"What I said was this : 'Mr. Duncan,' I said, 'I wish to speak a word to you about my son Theophilus, and the vacant incumbency of Dinglewood.'"

"Quite right !" applauded Mrs. Sprott.

"'Certainly, Sprott, certainly,' said he ; 'in fact I was going to mention that matter to you myself.' 'Well, sir,' I said, 'I cannot help feeling, quite apart from my partiality as a father, that my son is the man for Dinglewood. A young man of parts—with a University education—and never anything but a comfort to his mother and me from the day he was breeched, measles and whooping-cough having given us anxiety before. And he knows all the Dinglewood people too,' I said, 'and that is always a good thing in a country clergyman.'"

"And what did Mr. Duncan reply ?"

"What he replied, Susanna, was this : 'Sprott,' says he, 'I endorse every word that you've said ; I've always cherished the highest opinion of both Theophilus and his mother ; and I shall make a point of either speaking or writing to Miss Fallowfield upon the matter this very day.'"

Mrs. Sprott beamed. "I must say that you spoke up well, Timothy !"

Her husband fairly crowed with delight at this tribute to his courage. "I did my best, Susanna ; I kept him to the point, and was very firm, very firm with him. It is the only way."

"Theophilus, thank your father for having so exerted himself on your behalf." In spite of his forty-one years and her almost superstitious reverence for his Office, Mrs. Sprott never quite realized that her son was grown up.

"Of course I thank him, and am very grateful to him, mother; but it will not be any good—you will see it will not. Perhaps as a clergyman it may be deemed unseemly on my part, and contrary to my orthodox belief in an overruling Providence, to make use of such expressions—even before our old friends the Higginsons—as fortune, fate and luck. But, as you know, mother, I always pride myself upon saying what I think, however unexpected or even unacceptable it may be; and therefore I feel bound to state that to my mind it appears obvious that there is such a thing as malignant ill-luck, and that I am one of its chosen victims. Mark my words: as long as I live I shall never be Vicar of Dinglewood."

"One can never tell," remarked Mrs. Higginson in an oracular manner. "As the dear Doctor used to say, 'Those that will get a thing, will get it, and those that won't get it, won't.' I have heard him say it scores of times, if you will pardon the quotation. And may I make so bold as to express a hope, Theophilus, that your dear mother's wish may be fulfilled, and that we may see you filling the pulpit of Dinglewood Church ere we are many months older?"

But Theophilus only shook his head and sighed.

CHAPTER IV

MISS FALLOWFIELD'S LITTLE DINNER

Two or three days after the Sprotts' tea-party, Theophilus again bicycled over to Dinglewood to see his parents ; and, as it was late in the afternoon, he found his father at home as well as his mother.

"I have come," he began after the usual filial salutations, "to inform you that Miss Fallowfield has invited me to dinner at the Hall next Tuesday."

At this great news both Mr. and Mrs. Sprott purred with delight.

"A preliminary step, no doubt," quoth the proud father, "to her offering you the living of Dinglewood. I felt sure that my words to Mr. Duncan would bear fruit."

"It certainly looks like it," added the equally proud mother.

But Theophilus as usual shook his head. "Build no hopes, my dear parents, upon anything good ever happening to me. It never has and it never will. Through no fault of my own, I am a disappointed and embittered man ; and I think you can hardly blame me if I find a difficulty in stifling certain feelings of rebellion against my lot. It is all very well for those who have succeeded in attaining their heart's desire to practise the Christian grace of contentment ; but to such of us as have learnt life's lessons in a sterner school, resignation and submission do not seem so easy." Theophilus never left off preaching, even when he was talking to his mother. He carried his pulpit about with him wherever he went, as a snail carries its shell.

Mr. Sprott slapped his depressing son on the back. "Don't be so downhearted, my boy, don't be so downhearted! It is when the night is darkest that the luck is bound to turn, and when the tide is at its lowest ebb that the morning breaks." The worthy man's metaphors might be confused, but his meaning was clear.

"Have you got your evening-dress all right and proper for dining at the Hall?" asked Mrs. Sprott.

"How often shall I strive to impress upon you, my dear mother, that a clergyman is independent of evening dress? As long as he wears the garb of his sacred Office, he is fit to stand before kings."

"But even then he should see that he has a clean shirt in the drawer ready to wear with it," insisted the practical Susanna. "Have you one at your lodgings, Theophilus, or shall I send you an extra one from home?"

"I have plenty, thank you, mother."

"And what about your high silk waistcoat? Does it want ironing? If so, you'd better ride over on your bicycle with it to-morrow, and I'll see to it myself," said Mrs. Sprott, feeling much the same as Hannah felt when she took the yearly little coat up to the Temple. Human nature—and especially maternal human nature—does not vary much with time or place.

"It will be a great treat to you to dine at the Hall, Theophilus—a very great treat indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Sprott, glowing with that vicarious delight which is the chief joy of parents.

"It will be no particular joy to me, father. As a matter of fact, I do not care for Miss Fallowfield; her tongue is too sharp for my taste."

"Never mind her tongue, Theophilus. It is not her tongue but the living of Dinglewood that you have to attend to for the present," was the sensible advice of Mrs. Sprott.

"And I do not know that I altogether care about her views."

"Never mind her views either, as long as she takes the correct view of you. And even your own views might be put on one side just for the present, until you have secured the living. What I mean to say is that you need not exactly obtrude them unless they are specially asked for. Just make yourself agreeable, and let views and opinions and things of that kind rest for the time being." Poor Mrs. Sprott spoke with some anxiety: she knew her Theophilus.

But the latter looked shocked. "Do you mean to say, mother, that you think I am capable of making myself agreeable at the cost of my convictions and principles?"

"No, Theophilus, I do not think you are." (For the moment she wished she did.) "And that is what is worrying me. Nobody wants you to sacrifice your convictions and principles, my dear; that would be a shocking thing for anyone to do, especially a clergyman. All I mean is that there are occasions when it is not necessary to drag out all one's ideas and opinions into the light of day—when, in fact, it would seem almost obtrusive and presumptuous to do so." Mrs. Sprott's casuistry was perhaps not of the most exalted order; but the mother-love that prompted it was by no means an ignoble passion. In every human soul the wheat and the tares grow side by side, and it is often difficult to disentangle them.

Tuesday evening duly came, and Theophilus Sprott presented himself at Dinglewood Hall at the witching hour of 7.45.

It was only a small dinner-party, called together for the express purpose of sampling Theophilus, and seeing if he were—as his mother and Mr. Duncan imagined him to be—the right man to rule over Dinglewood parish; and it

consisted, in addition to the two hostesses, of Mr. Duncan, Octavius Rainbrow, and Theophilus himself. The dinner was admirable, as Miss Fallowfield's dinners always were; and that lady looked very handsome in a crimson satin gown trimmed with some exquisite old lace, while her niece was irresistible in white net, abundantly sprinkled with silver sequins.

Miss Fallowfield asked Theophilus to say grace; whereupon he offered up a decidedly prosy, not to say pompous, petition, having reference to both bodily and spiritual food; and the meal began.

"How did you enjoy the Merchester Musical Festival last week, Mr. Rainbrow?" the hostess asked. "I saw you there, and I hear from your uncle that you were representing the *Morning Sunset*."

"I was, Miss Fallowfield. That is to say I was doing my little best—feeble though it might be—to stem the tide of Philistinism which is flooding the country at present; and to teach that hydra-headed monster, the British Public, when to nod its heads with approval and when to shake them with disgust."

"How beautifully he does put things!" thought Dagmar to herself.

But her aunt—being nearly thirty years older—was less impressionable and more discriminating. "And did you find the monster's mouths sufficiently tender to the bit?" she asked.

"Alas! no. The continual Vandalism of the Victorian period has sapped the life of art in England, and left it a veritable valley of dry bones." Octavius did not know exactly what he meant by this; but the number of "v's" in the sentence delighted him. He was always prepared to sacrifice all such minor matters as truth or sense to the beauties of alliteration. That was his idea of style.

"But I am sure you enjoyed the Festival itself," Miss Fallowfield continued.

Octavius shuddered. "Enjoyed it? It was a period of prolonged and procrastinated agony to me!"

"What a pity! Dagmar and I enjoyed it so much, didn't we, Dagmar?"

"I should just think we did, aunt Charlotte! and especially the *Elijah*."

At this Octavius almost fainted. "The *Elijah!* Enjoyed the *Elijah!* Good heavens! what will you say next?"

"Oh! I simply loved it," persisted Dagmar, addressing the great authority with considerable courage. "I think all that part is so splendid when the fire doesn't come down and when it does. It excited me so that I got quite frightened for fear it shouldn't come in the end after all, though, of course, I knew all the time that it really would."

"Mere claptrap," groaned Octavius; "claptrap and pantomime! Mendelssohn was no true artist. What could be cruder than his treatment of the whole subject—except perhaps the subject which he treated?"

Dagmar's eyes opened wide with astonishment not unmixed with horror. "But it is out of the Bible," she said with a little gasp.

"So I have heard; but what can be cruder than the Bible? I never read it myself for that reason," replied Octavius.

"Ah! there you make a mistake," his uncle interrupted him drily; "it is the most perfect 'well of English undefiled.'"

"But I do not care for that kind of English; it is too Saxon for my taste. I do not like pure Saxon; give me the roll and the roar, the pageant and the purple, of the Latin tongues."

"Do you object to Shakespeare on the same grounds, may I ask?" Mr. Duncan inquired.

"I do," replied Octavius the Infallible; "I never read him either. My profession—or rather my art—is the writing of perfect English, and I dare not imperil my proficiency by infecting my mind with inferior styles. According to my ideas, the plays of Shakespeare are no more literature than the tunes of Mendelssohn are music; they are alike crude; good enough for their own times but not for ours."

"I see, I see," Mr. Duncan's dryness of tone was still lost upon his nephew.

"Shakespeare never touches me," the latter continued; "never thrills me with the throb of his own humanity: *L'Allegro* leaves me critically cold, and *Il Penseroso* leaves me profoundly unmoved."

"But that isn't altogether Shakespeare's fault," suggested Miss Fallowfield blandly, "considering that Milton wrote them."

Octavius however was unabashed. "Ah! so he did," he admitted with magnificent indifference. "I always confuse the two. To me all the Elizabethan poets are alike; what one wrote all might have written."

"And the fact that Milton wasn't an Elizabethan doesn't seem to clear the confusion, eh, Octavius?" suggested Mr. Duncan.

"Ah! was he not? Possibly you are right. I never had a head for dates. To me dates are the dust and the dry rot of history, and merely serve to confuse the mind of the historian."

"Well, and what did you think of the Festival, Mr. Sprott?" asked Miss Fallowfield, turning to her other guest; "I suppose you went a good many times, as you were on the ground?" Miss Fallowfield was an excellent hostess, and always managed to include all her guests in her conversation. She was a clever woman, and one, moreover, strongly imbued with the social instinct. Any

hitch in the ease and flow of a conversation was to her what a wrong note of music is to a musician.

"No, Miss Fallowfield; I did not go at all; I do not approve of music as a handmaid to religion, and I therefore never encourage sacred music on any pretext whatever."

"If you shudder at Oratorio, I am with you," exclaimed Octavius. "To my mind Oratorio is a relic of barbarism —a survival of the Stone Age. Opera if you will, but not Oratorio, if you love me!"

"Oh! but you are both wrong!" cried Dagmar. "I think music and religion ought always to be mixed up together because they are so like each other somehow; and there is nothing that makes you feel so religious as music, when they are the right sort of tunes. I always consider the hymns much the most important part of the Church service."

"Do you indeed, my dear, do you indeed?" exclaimed Mr. Duncan. "For my part I should have considered them merely a modern accretion, devoid alike of the spirit of worship and the spirit of instruction which respectively animate the prayers and the sermons."

"Well, *I* like them the best, anyway," replied Dagmar, as if that settled the matter.

Octavius put his single eye-glass into one eye and looked at her with the other. "Did I understand you to say, Miss Silverthorne, that you call hymn-tunes music?"

"Of course I do. What else can they be? They aren't prayers and they aren't sermons."

"I have known them both," murmured Miss Fallowfield.

"Whatever you sing must be music or else you couldn't sing it," said Dagmar with that little air of finality that became her so well. "So hymns must be music because you sing them."

Octavius opened his eyes so wide at this statement that he failed to retain his precious eye-glass, and it fell with a clink against his plate.

"Dagmar always loves her hymns in Church," said Miss Fallowfield, with that smile, half amused and half tender, which she reserved for her pretty niece; "and she sings them with her whole heart."

"Except when I don't agree with them," added Dagmar; "and then I shut my mouth tight, and won't sing a word."

"Very amusing, 'pon my word—very quaint and amusing indeed!" quoth Mr. Duncan, who pursued precisely the same course himself with regard to the Athanasian Creed; but then things done by another are so essentially different from exactly the same things done by oneself. "Ha, ha, ha! So Miss Dagmar is among the prophets. And may I inquire what are the things that your charming little conscience won't allow your sweet little mouth to sing—eh, my dear young lady?"

"I won't sing hymns that call me a worm, because I'm not a worm, as anybody can see; and I won't sing hymns that say I lisp, because I don't lisp, as anybody can hear. And then I won't sing warming hymns on hot days, or cooling hymns on cold days."

Mr. Duncan continued to laugh heartily; the idea of Dagmar's declining on conscientious grounds to take her own little part in that daily service which had been compiled and prescribed for public worship by a State Church, struck him as so extremely humorous. "And may I ask what are warming hymns and what are cooling ones, eh, Miss Dagmar?"

"Oh! don't you know? Martial hymns make you nice and warm in cold weather, and soothing ones keep you nice and cool in hot weather. Singing warlike hymns in summer is like eating hot boiled beef in June; and

"'I do not approve of anything emotional in a religious service'" (*see page 71*).

singing peaceful ones in winter is like drinking lemon-squash on Christmas Day."

"I do not approve of anything emotional in a religious service," said Theophilus; "it makes it partake too much of the nature of a revival."

"I don't see that it is any the worse for that," replied Miss Fallowfield. "Surely the emotions are one of the roads by which the soul is reached; it seems to me a terrible responsibility to block up any windows which let in a single ray of the light from Heaven."

But Theophilus did not agree with her and said so. "Pardon me, Miss Fallowfield, but you are totally wrong." (It might have been his mother who was speaking.) "Any appeal to the senses is an appeal to the lowest in us, and is therefore not to be tolerated in the cause of truth."

"Still, through the lower we can sometimes reach the higher," persisted Miss Fallowfield. "Surely the sacramental idea runs through everything, and the outward and visible form becomes transformed by the inward and spiritual grace into something far better than itself. For my part I do not think the emotions are sufficiently considered as important factors in the life of the soul."

"A most dangerous doctrine, Miss Fallowfield—a most pernicious and dangerous doctrine!"

"Do you think so, Mr. Sprott? I cannot see eye to eye with you. After all, whether we agree or whether we do not agree with the tenets of the Reformed Church, we cannot deny that the Church of England has never taken the same hold upon the hearts of the English people since the Reformation as she took before, simply because then she appealed to them through their senses, and now she appeals to them through their intellect."

"A dangerous doctrine," repeated the outraged cleric; "Popish and dangerous!"

But the lady held her own. "Not at all, Mr. Sprott! Personally I hold that the doctrine of the Anglican Church has been far purer and sounder since the Reformation—far more in accordance with the teachings of the early and primitive Church—than it was in the Middle Ages after it became imbued with Roman accretions and superstitions; but I maintain that though the doctrines of the Anglican Church are purer than they were then, her methods are less wise and less successful. Understand me: I do not hold with all the teaching of the pre-Reformation Church—I only hold with the manner in which it was taught."

"I do not approve of forms and ceremonies at all," said Theophilus; "they seem to me vain and idolatrous, and tend to put the shadow in place of the substance."

"Don't you think," suggested Miss Fallowfield, "that to some natures they convey, by means of the shadow, the true meaning of the substance?"

"No, I do not. To the truly religious mind, forms and ceremonies must always be a snare and a stumbling-block."

"But what about the irreligious mind? The Church, like her Master, comes not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. And may not they be touched through their senses or their emotions, when a purely moral or intellectual call would leave them unmoved?" urged Miss Fallowfield.

But Theophilus was nothing if not obstinate. "If they are only touched through their senses and emotions they had better not be touched at all."

Here Mr. Duncan put in a word. "Then how about Saint Paul's 'all things to all men,' that he by all means might gain some; eh, Mr. Sprott?"

"I have always differed from Saint Paul on that point," replied Theophilus, with a finality of manner quite equal to Miss Silverthorne herself.

"Of course," returned the hostess, "I fully agree with you, Mr. Sprott, that to some natures stern simplicity in all things connected with religion is essential; and by all means let such people retain their stern simplicity. Possibly they are the highest type. But if there are other people — and there certainly are — who can only learn by the seeing eye and not by the understanding heart, then appeal to these persons through their senses and their emotions."

"And you call yourself a Protestant?"

"I do not call myself so, Mr. Sprott, because I dislike the word; but I am undoubtedly the thing which that word expresses. What I mean is that the Medieval Church realized that she was dealing with human nature as a whole—that is to say, with men's emotions and senses as well as with their minds and spirits—and she made her appeal to all sides of a man; but the modern Church seems to me to deal too exclusively with the purely mental and moral part of human nature, and to confine its appeals too much to the ethical and intellectual sensibilities. It was not only the unreformed Church that recognized the many-sidedness of human nature and dealt with it; the early Methodists learnt the lesson in their day, and so has the Salvation Army in ours; and consequently the common people hear them both gladly."

"Again I think you are utterly wrong," persisted Theophilus, "and your instances prove it; for if there are any religious bodies of which I disapprove more than of the Roman Catholics, they are the so-called Free Churches. I detest Nonconformity in any shape whatsoever."

"I, on the contrary," retorted Miss Fallowfield somewhat warmly, "feel a great interest in and sympathy with Nonconformity."

"So do I, so do I," echoed Mr. Duncan; "my dear mother was a Nonconformist, and she was the best woman

that ever lived. If there were more like her, the world would be a different place from what it is." And Mr. Duncan sighed the sigh of deep affection and true filial piety. There were wheat-ears as well as tares in the soul of this man of the world, and his devotion to his mother had been among the richest and ripest of them. "In fact," he continued, with a moist eye and a softened voice, "I used to go to Chapel with her when I was a little fellow, and I still feel the greatest interest in all shades of Nonconformity." He did not add that he also evinced the most substantial sympathy with all kinds of Nonconformist charity in Merchester; and that he did it for his mother's sake.

"Then you are much to blame, sir," retorted Theophilus. "I myself have no patience with Dissent of any kind, and I consider it a direct sin to encourage schism."

"Nonconformity is not necessarily schism," replied Mr. Duncan with some heat.

"Pardon me, sir, but I think it is."

"Considering, Sprott, that my mother was a Nonconformist, you must excuse me if I take exception—and very strong exception—to your unwarrantable strictures upon Nonconformity. In my opinion Nonconformity has produced some of the saints of the earth."

But Theophilus was not to be gainsaid. "I have nothing to do with your mother, sir—no responsibility concerning her whatever, nor concerning any heresy which she thought fit to sanction. She has doubtless discovered her error by this time, and is suffering the consequences of it. But I feel that I owe it to myself to lift up my voice against mysticism on the one hand, and sensuousness on the other, in all matters connected with religion." Here Theophilus glowed with spiritual pride, and felt that he was indeed standing before kings unashamed. "I belong to that section of the English Church which is

called 'Broad,' and I consider it my duty openly to testify against the dangers arising from sensuous indulgence in the emotions."

"Oh! you belong to that party in the Church which is called 'Broad,' do you?" asked Miss Fallowfield.

"I do; and I pride myself upon my breadth. In fact, I am so broad—so convinced that any point of view which is not broad is incorrect, and therefore heretical—that I would banish from the Church all those whose doctrines are less broad than my own. For instance, what can be narrower than the Roman view that salvation is found only in the Roman Church? And on the other hand, what can be narrower than the Evangelical view that the Scriptures must be accepted literally or not at all? I feel so strongly the danger arising from the narrowness of the High Churchman on the one hand and the Low Churchman on the other, that, if I had my way, I would put down both extremes by law, and retain only the Broad Church party as the real Church of England."

"In fact, if you had your way, you would revive the Inquisition," suggested Mr. Duncan.

But Theophilus denied the soft impeachment. "Certainly not, sir. The Inquisition was a Roman invention, and as such I utterly repudiate it. According to my belief, no good thing can come out of Rome."

"I had no idea you were so broad in your views and sympathies, Mr. Sprott," said Miss Fallowfield in a tone of ominous suavity.

"Ah! but I am. As I have told you, I abominate equally the ceremonialism of the High Churchman and the emotionalism of the Evangelical; and I would punish equally all who dabble in these dangerous extremes."

"You are indeed broad!" the hostess murmured.

"I am, Miss Fallowfield, I am thankful to say; and I should have been still broader had I not been so unfor-

tunate in the matter of my education and upbringing. But that, I must tell you, is my fate ; through no fault of my own I am always doomed to ill-luck and disappointment. An unfortunate star must have presided over my birth."

"How very inconsiderate of it!" remarked Miss Fallowfield. "And how did this star intermeddle in the matter of your education ?"

"By condemning me to go to Oxford, when all the time it was the desire of my heart to go to Cambridge. I had no sympathy—and never shall have—with the spirit of Oxford, that depressing and medieval 'home of lost causes and impossible beliefs'! I was trammelled by its conventions and irritated by its traditions; and my character refused to develop and expand in such uncongenial surroundings. In the freer thought and wider views of Cambridge I should have been at home ; in the narrow ideas and still narrower creeds of Oxford I was in a prison-house ; and the iron of that prison-house entered into my soul. Like every other event in my ill-fated career, my University life was one long disillusion and disappointment. As you know, I was only a pass-man ; but had I gone to Cambridge and pursued my own bent, I should have probably taken my place among the Wranglers. But here, as ever, Fate was against me." Theophilus did not forget that it was owing to Mr. Duncan's generosity that he had been able to go to the University at all ; on the contrary, he dwelt thus at length upon the subject, in order to prove to his benefactor that he felt no inclination to cringe with gratitude for favours already received. His was the pride which can stoop to accept benefits, but cannot condescend to be grateful for them ; and he felt that he owed it to himself (Theophilus was ever punctilious to defray to the uttermost farthing debts of this description) to show Mr. Duncan that this gentleman's benefits evoked

no unseemly sense of obligation in his protégé's manly and independent breast. And again that cheerful sensation of standing unashamed before kings thrilled through the soul of Theophilus Sprott.

Mr. Duncan, however, apparently changed the subject. "That was an unwise prayer of the poet that some Power would 'the giftie gie us, to see oursels as others see us,'" he remarked; "a singularly unwise prayer for even a poet to offer up! It would make some of us so very uncomfortable."

"Fortunately it is a prayer that is never answered," retorted Miss Fallowfield quickly; "or else the world would be a less habitable place than it is."

During the theological discussion the two younger members of the party had indulged in a *tête-à-tête* conversation, theology not being one of the subjects included in Mr. Rainbrow's curriculum for the education of the public; but at the mention of the word *poet*, Octavius pricked up his ears, as literature and the arts came under his own special patronage.

"What poet offered up that particular petition?" he inquired of his uncle; "I do not altogether recognize the quotation."

"One Burns by name," replied Mr. Duncan, again with a certain dryness in his tone; "probably you have never heard of him."

But the maker of public opinion was not to be caught napping. "Of course—of course—how careless of me! A Scotchman, I believe, and not altogether a pious one. Now that you mention the name, naturally I recognize the quotation at once; but I make a point of never reading anything written by a Scotchman, as I so shrink and shudder at the accent." How well-informed he was, Dagmar said to herself; whatever subject was mentioned, Octavius always seemed to know all about it. So thought

little Miss Silverthorne; but what Mr. Duncan and Miss Fallowfield thought, nobody knew.

"I hardly think you are justified, however, Miss Fallowfield," continued the great writer, "in saying that the poet's prayer is never answered."

"I never came across an instance of it myself."

"Pardon me; there you are mistaken. You have an instance sitting at your own table at the present moment."

"Indeed; how very interesting!" The hostess was politeness itself.

"I see myself exactly as others see me," continued Octavius.

"Well, I don't; and I thank the Lord for it!" exclaimed Mr. Duncan—rather rudely his nephew thought.

The latter went on: "I see myself as a man with certain gifts, modified by certain limitations."

"Let us hear about the limitations, eh, Octavius?"

Octavius ignored his uncle's interruption. "I see myself as a man plentifully endowed with the critical faculty, yet perhaps a shade too cruel in the exercise of it; as a man of culture and refinement, yet perhaps liable to err on the side of fastidiousness; and as a man of such keen perception of the beautiful and the true, as perchance to be unduly intolerant of the inferior and the second-best."

"Such as Shakespeare and the Bible in literature, and Handel and Mendelssohn in art," suggested Miss Fallowfield.

"Precisely; how well you understand! Now I think I have indeed proved to you that I am a living answer to the petition of the poet; I wonder what Mr. Sprott's views on the subject are," added Octavius, graciously turning to his fellow-guest.

"Very much the same as your own, Mr. Rainbrow. I likewise have the gift—I may say the unfortunate gift—of

seeing myself as I really am. I see a weary and ill-fated man, doomed through no fault of his own to perpetual disappointment and failure. I see, alas! that I am not as successful nor as useful a man as I might have been; but I also see that my shortcomings and failings have been the fault of my circumstances and not of myself. Had Providence granted me other surroundings, I should doubtless have developed into the character that Nature intended me to be. But I have had no chance of developing my gifts or expanding my powers. I have never succeeded in doing or gaining anything that I wanted, and I do not believe I ever shall so succeed; but I have the comfort of knowing that it is not my own fault, but the fault of a malign fortune which from my very birth has thwarted and fought against me."

"There!" exclaimed Octavius; "I think that in Mr. Sprott as well as in myself you find a proof of the efficacy of the poet's prayer. You own yourself, uncle, that you have not this self-revealing vision; but what about Miss Fallowfield?"

"Oh! I broke my mirror years ago on purpose."

Octavius sighed. "A mistake, if you will excuse my saying so, my dear lady. I can assure you that it is only through clear self-perception that we attain to true self-culture."

Miss Fallowfield smiled. "But I am old enough to have learnt that though the wisdom of life consists in seeing things as they are, the happiness of life consists in seeing things as they are not—oneself included."

"And what about little Miss Dagmar?" asked Mr. Duncan, as the hostess rose from the table. "We must hear what she has to say for herself before she goes."

"Oh! I wouldn't let other people see me as I see myself for anything—it's just all the other way with me. I know I'm nothing like as pretty or as nice as people

think I am, but I wouldn't for worlds let them find it out. I know you all think I am perfectly charming, but I'm not really a bit; I only know what to wear, and how to put it on, and how to talk, and how to look pleasant, and how to do my hair. You all think that is prettiness—but it isn't. It's just the trick of how it's done."

"At any rate you know how to talk to a man," said Octavius, speaking as he thought from experience.

"No, I don't; I only know how to make a man talk to me. Which is practically the same thing, and a great deal better."

And with this parting shot, pretty Miss Dagmar followed her aunt out of the room.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW VICAR

A WEEK after Miss Fallowfield's little dinner, Dinglewood was thrilled to its centre to hear that the lady of the manor had put the matter of the presentation into the hands of the Bishop of Merchester; and had, in accordance with his lordship's advice, seen fit to appoint a Mr. Forrester to the vacant incumbency.

Luke Forrester, it was further reported, had been working for many years in a slum-parish in the heart of the Black Country; but as he was now getting on in life, the Bishop thought it was time for him to be transferred to a sphere where there was less work and more pay; and therefore appointed him Vicar of Dinglewood. Finally it was bruited abroad that the new Vicar was a widower with one son; and the maiden hearts of the neighbourhood throbbed with that admixture of hope and excitement which the advent of a marriageable cleric never fails to awaken in the breast of mature virginity.

"It is exactly what I expected," said Theophilus Sprott to his mother, soon after the crushing blow had fallen; "or at any rate what I ought to have expected, had not delusive hope for the moment obscured my vision. It really seemed to me that at last my luck was about to turn, and that well-earned content and richly-deserved happiness were to be the portion of one who had endured misfortune for so long. But alas! I miscalculated the relentless and pitiless force of that demon which has pursued me from

my birth." Heavy as the blow had been, it had not succeeded in knocking Theophilus out of his pulpit.

"Yes, it is a bad business altogether," replied Mrs. Sprott, who—owing to that Hannah-like feeling which permeated her soul—perhaps felt the disappointment even more than her son did. "Are you sure that you said nothing to annoy or offend Miss Fallowfield that night you dined at the Hall?"

"Certainly not, my dear mother. As I have already informed you, we passed a most pleasant, not to say instructive, evening; and I flatter myself that the little I did say upon matters connected with the Church was such as to impress my hearers with the sense of how thoroughly fitted I was to undertake the charge of a parish."

"You'd better have kept clear of religion altogether as I told you to do. It is generally the safest course."

"Pardon me, my dear mother, but you forget my cloth." An absurd accusation on the part of Theophilus, since his cloth, so to speak, blinded the eyes of his mother to anything and everything else! "I cannot, as a clergyman, keep silence upon matters which are specially committed to my charge; and particularly when what I consider heresies are being propounded in my very hearing. Then I feel that I owe it to myself to speak out."

Mrs. Sprott pricked up her ears; she began to understand the situation a little better; for she was sharp enough to know that when men are so very scrupulous about defraying what they owe to themselves the burden of the expenses is apt to fall upon their womankind. "Nevertheless I warned you against speaking out, Theophilus; you know I did. It would have been quite time enough to speak out when you were safe in Dinglewood pulpit; and there would have been plenty of opportunity then."

Theophilus drew himself up rather huffily. "A clergyman is the best judge himself of when and when not to say the word in season; and I cannot see people falling into the pit of Ritualism on the one hand, or the slough of Dissent on the other, without putting out a friendly hand to save them. I am sure you mean kindly, mother; but, believe me, I am a far better judge than you as to what to say and how to say it; and I cannot be dictated to upon this matter by anyone."

Mrs. Sprott sighed. She was not always perhaps a wise woman; but, in spite of her son's reproof, she had occasional glimmerings of sense as to what not to say and how not to say it; and this was one of the occasions. "Well, my dear, it is a disappointment, and it is no good pretending that I do not feel it; for I do; not for my own sake or your father's, but for yours. I should like to see you in a position suited to your gifts and powers where you could freely exercise those gifts and powers to the glory of God; and I should also like to see you in a more assured position pecuniarily speaking; for although your father has saved a little year by year out of his salary, if anything were to happen to him, you and I should be but scantily provided for."

"Well, my dear mother, that is not my fault. For my part I do not think that my father was justified in marrying upon such slender means as he considered adequate; I think he should have remained single until he had saved sufficient money to endow a family should he happen to have one; but naturally this was a matter upon which my opinion was not asked, and for obvious reasons could not be offered. As you know, I do not approve of early marriages; but if a man will persist in marrying before he has saved a nest-egg for himself and his possible family, I am convinced that he ought to select a lady with some means of her own."

Mrs. Sprott winced at this; she had been a governess before her marriage. But she did not realize that Theophilus was merely behaving according to the training which she herself had bestowed upon him. She had carefully implanted in the soul of her son the thorn of self-advancement and the thistle of worldly wisdom; so it was a little unreasonable of her now to expect to gather from these plants the grapes of love or the figs of unselfishness. Such an expectation on her part argued a culpable ignorance of the elementary principles of spiritual horticulture.

"Do you know anything of your supplanter, Theophilus?" she asked, once more wisely changing the subject.

"Yes, mother, I do. Mr. Forrester has been working for years in the Black Country, and is a most unsuitable man for the parish. He is one of those dangerous clergymen who combine advanced Ritualism with vigorous Revivalism; just the kind of man to do untold harm in a country parish by waking up into unprecedented activity the souls of the people committed to his charge, and thus unfitting them for their daily toil and humble position. I have no doubt in my own mind that Miss Fallowfield will rue the day when she introduced such a firebrand as this into the parish of Dinglewood, in spite of the fact that she had to her hand the very man for the place."

And then Theophilus and his mother proceeded to discuss, with not unmitigated sorrow, the gloomy prospect opening out before them of the spiritual future of Dinglewood.

It was not long after this that the new Vicar and his son took up their residence at the Vicarage; thereby—although no one knew it at the time—completely changing the current of the lives of nearly all the people connected with this story.

Luke Forrester was a man of about fifty, and a man who looked considerably older than his years. That term which people are so fond of applying to the middle-aged, "well-preserved" (as if these latter were a species of ginger or candied-fruits), was in no way applicable to him; he had been willing to spend and to be spent in the service of his Master, and the story of this was written upon his face. He was tall and thin, with a slight stoop, and his hair was fast turning grey. So much for his outward appearance. As for the inward man, he was one of those rare persons who are absolutely unworldly—who have never for an instant bowed the knee in the temple of Mammon, and to whom it has not even occurred to do so. This rare and all-compelling quality of unworldliness is not necessarily always found in religious persons; it is frequently the prerogative of the artist and the poet; and is really more a natural gift than a Christian grace. In short it is the quintessence of fine fibre and good-breeding; and sometimes even thoroughly God-fearing people are entirely lacking in it. But wherever it is found it holds powerful though unconscious sway; for the world is ever ready to bow down before the few who utterly despise it.

We are all alike forbidden to love the world or the things of the world; but only to some of us is it a temptation, while to others it is none at all. Mr. Forrester was one of the latter. It would never have come into his mind to pray that he might be saved from caring too much for the things of this world; he would as soon have thought of praying that he might be saved from dropping his "h's" or from eating peas with a knife. The spirit of worldliness —had he ever thought about it at all—would not have struck him as being so wrong but as being so vulgar. For one thing, he was a man of good family, who had always occupied an absolutely secure social position;

and perhaps sometimes—even sanctified human nature still being very human—the knowledge that one's name is inscribed in the *Landed Gentry* is a surer antidote to mundane ambition than the belief that it is written in the Book of Life.

Luke Forrester had lost his wife when he and she were still young; but a full-length oil-painting of her, which always hung in his dining-room, testified to what a beautiful woman she must have been. The time came when Charlotte Fallowfield envied the original of this portrait as she had never envied anyone in her life before; when she felt that she would gladly have bartered her fortune for the face which had lighted the world for Luke Forrester in the days gone by; but she had to learn, as we all have to learn sooner or later, that we are called to make the best of the talents which we have, instead of thinking how much better we could have done with those that are entrusted to other people.

Mr. Forrester had one child, a son, whose age was twenty-three when the two came to Dinglewood. Claude Forrester physically resembled his dead mother rather than his living father, and was therefore a singularly handsome young man. There was a warm touch about his beauty, as there had been about his mother's, which gave the impression that their eyes and lips had been kissed by southern suns. He was tall and dark, with thick curly hair and a complexion like a ripe peach; and his eyes were brown and velvety, shaded by curling black lashes.

His profession was that of an architect, and he promised to distinguish himself in his own line, for he was artistic to his finger-tips, and was utterly absorbed in the work that he had chosen.

He was sincerely attached to his father; but all the romance of his nature had clustered round the memory of

his mother, whose gaiety and beauty he could just remember. At present her image was to him the embodiment of all that was highest and brightest and loveliest in life—the type of that fundamental and eternal joy and beauty which are the beginning and the end of all things.

With an almost pagan worship for the beauties of art and nature, Claude combined a truly religious instinct ; so that he was indeed one in heart with those old builders and painters who wrought upon their knees for the glory of God and the beautifying of the world—the only spirit in which truly artistic work can ever be done.

Such then were the two men who were suddenly set down in the midst of Dinglewood for the general upsetting and reforming and renovation of that parish ; and for the undoing of those faithful if tardy suitors, Reginald Duncan and his nephew, Octavius Rainbrow, who—though they were not men enough to carry off their respective fair ladies in spite of certain lions in the way—were quite men enough to object very strongly to any other man's doing so.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

AN intimate friendship quickly sprang up between the Hall and the Vicarage, after Mr. Forrester and his son had settled down at the latter. And before that winter was over, this friendship promised—at any rate in one quarter—to ripen into love.

Its course, however, did not run altogether smoothly as regards the younger members of the party. There was a mutual antagonism, as well as a mutual attraction, between Claude Forrester and Dagmar Silverthorne. The pagan side of Claude's nature responded at once to the girl's brightness and beauty; but the irresponsible vein in her character never failed to jar upon that part of his own which was almost monkish in its austerity. There was nothing of the Puritan about the young architect, but there was a great deal of the medieval monk; two extremes which to the casual observer would seem much the same, but which are really essentially different. Outwardly the two types exhibited alike the same uncompromising sternness and unbending asceticism; but fundamentally there was a great gulf fixed between the domesticated yet unromantic Puritan, who regarded art as a delusion of the flesh, and beauty as a snare of the devil, and who hardly dared to show any love even towards his wife and children lest he should thereby seem to be putting the creature before the Creator; and the mystical and celibate monk, who was so absorbed in the entrancing mysteries of his spiritual life that he had no time and no inclination for

earthly ties, and who toiled long and late to master such arts as those of painting and sculpture and architecture, so that he might thereby illumine the Word of God and worship Him in temples made with hands.

This monastic phase in Claude Forrester's character was at constant warfare with Dagmar's thoughts and words; she took nothing seriously, while he took everything in that manner; and they were as yet too young to have acquired that charity which suffereth long and is kind, and which is rarely, if ever, an acquisition of the twenties. Claude was always comparing Dagmar with his idealized remembrance of his mother—much to the former's disadvantage. True, the girl was merry and young and very beautiful; but so was his mother, he argued, and she was good and wise as well. She, he felt sure, would have understood and sympathized with that ascetic strain in his nature, which Dagmar alternately quarrelled with and laughed at.

On the other hand Dagmar's easy-going light-heartedness rebelled against the austerity which was an ingrained part of Claude's nature; and whilst he thought her too frivolous, she thought him too severe.

But although she was as yet far from falling in love with the Vicar's son, her intercourse with him opened her eyes to some of Mr. Rainbrow's faults as well as to a good many of his own. She had a decided amount of natural cleverness, and she was soon able to discover the difference between Claude's thorough knowledge of art and Octavius Rainbrow's pretended proficiency in it. There is nothing which shows up paste so quickly as the appearance on the scene of real diamonds; and Claude's artistic culture was very real as far as it went. He was also a well-read and well-informed young man all round; he could hardly have lived with his father without being so; and Dagmar was quick to compare his conversation with the conversation

of the worthy Octavius, and to discriminate between the two.

But this awakening of the Sleeping Beauty to intelligence if not to love, in no way suited Mr. Rainbrow's book. He fully intended eventually to marry Miss Silverthorne, when he had enjoyed the freedom and pleasure of single life a little longer—in short, until he was tired of it; and he had no intention of letting any other man step in and annex what he considered his own property. Although he was foolish enough to believe that he did see himself as others saw him, he was wise enough to know that this vision should be kept at all costs from the eyes of his future wife—wherein he showed a somewhat profound knowledge of the ethics of conjugal happiness; and he had no idea of allowing "that puppy Forrester," as he called him, to teach Dagmar to criticize the criticisms of the *Morning Sunset*.

There was a certain leaven of sense in the lump of Mr. Rainbrow's foolishness; and this leaven led him to the conclusion that when two young (or even older) people of opposite sex meet each other every day, and quarrel with one another at least three times a week, Cupid is sharpening his arrows if he has not already fitted one to his bow. Of course the little god may not actually shoot—sometimes he does not—but he is at what soldiers call "'tention," and there is danger abroad.

So after long and careful consideration Octavius made up his great mind that it is even better to get a thing at once than to lose it altogether—that it is a happier fate to marry the woman you love while you are still young enough to enjoy yourself, than it is to see her married to somebody else. And he did not forget that hundred thousand pounds which it was well known that Miss Fallowfield had settled upon her niece; his artistic perceptions were far too clear to lose sight of a little detail of that

kind. Like the Reverend Mr. Sprott, he did not approve of early marriages as far as his own sex were concerned; but he shared that gentleman's opinion that ample means on the lady's part to some extent neutralized the objection.

One bright frosty afternoon, when Octavius happened to be staying at his uncle's, he rode over to Dinglewood for the express purpose of putting a spoke in the wheel of young Forrester. As luck would have it, he overtook Miss Silverthorne on the high-road, where she was taking the daily "constitutional" upon which her aunt insisted; and he naturally alighted from his horse (or, rather, from his uncle's horse) and joined her. Now the luck which brought about this meeting was not altogether favourable to Octavius; for he was a very inferior horseman, and was always more or less in mortal fear of the animal he bestrode. True, on this occasion he no longer bestrode his steed; but he had to lead it, and that frightened him still more, as the fear of being either kicked or bitten was added to his other terrors of being flung up into the air or trampled down into the ground. He would not have ridden at all if he could with any decency have got out of it; but his uncle was such an excellent horseman himself and was so contemptuous of all men who were not, that even the superb self-complacency of Octavius shrank from showing the white feather when Mr. Duncan offered him a mount.

Therefore the environment of his interview with Miss Silverthorne was by no means a happy one. Like the politician who explained that "he was obliged to follow his supporters because he was their leader," Mr. Rainbrow had to dance after his uncle's favourite hack in any direction that the sweet will of the animal indicated; and it must be admitted that the creature's methods were circuitous.

"I am very fortunate to have this favourable opportunity of a little friendly talk with you, Miss Silverthorne," he began, as usual rich in alliterations. He did not think it necessary to add that his thankfulness was augmented by the fact that he had met the Vicar's son walking towards Merchester some five minutes before he overtook Miss Silverthorne walking in the opposite direction ; and he at once jumped to the obvious inference (for as the trunk of an elephant can pick up a pin as well as uproot a tree, so the mind of Octavius could turn aside from profound criticism of the arts and sciences to study the follies and frailties of mere human nature) that the lady had accompanied the gentleman for a mile or two on his way.

"So you may be, Mr. Rainbrow, but I am arraid your horse does not share your pleasure."

Dagmar, fresh from a violent quarrel with Claude Forrester, found the conversation of Octavius somewhat cloying.

"I have been feeling for some time," he continued, "that there has arisen a bar or barrier between your spirit and mine. There seems to be a discord in the harmony or our friendship—a break in the continuity of our souls' communion."

At this point the horse—as if to illustrate and accentuate the last sentence—made an effectual break in the continuity of the conversation by darting incontinently to the other side of the road, Octavius still dangling from the bridle like a charm from a watch-chain ; and it was some minutes before the skittish animal could be induced to allow its leader to walk once more by the side of Miss Silverthorne.

When comparative peace was restored (and it was only comparative, as the steed walked with a hiccoughing sort of movement which continually threatened to drag

Octavius's arm out of its socket), that gentleman proceeded :—

"I put down this discord in the former harmony of our friendship to no fault upon your part, no failing upon mine, but to the introduction of a third and unsympathetic factor between us—in short, to the intrusion of Mr. Claude Forrester."

"But he isn't a factor," explained Dagmar, with every appearance of childish innocence ; "he is an architect."

"I care not for his profession ; I am only concerned with his practice," replied Octavius, with a wave of his hand indicative of the indifference which he felt towards the calling of the younger Forrester. But the horse mistook the significance of the gesture, regarding it as an encouragement to playful mirth ; and caracoled about the road accordingly.

When the exuberance of the cheerful creature was once more calmed down, Octavius again attempted to proffer his suit.

"You see, dear friend, my point is this. Your sympathy and friendship have meant so much to me that I cannot bear that any man—be he architect or otherwise—should come between us ; and this is what I am profoundly and painfully convinced that Mr. Forrester is doing."

"He is doing nothing of the kind," retorted Dagmar. "In the first place his opinions have no effect whatever upon me—I don't even listen to them ; and in the second place the mere fact that he thinks a thing always makes me think the very opposite on purpose."

This confession served to raise the spirits of Octavius : and would have proved more consolatory than it did, had not the horse raised the arm of Octavius even higher than his spirits. While he was endeavouring to regain his equilibrium, Miss Silverthorne continued :

"I can't imagine what makes you think I am friends with Mr. Forrester, because we are the greatest enemies possible. I can't bear the sight of him."

"Then I can only wonder at the power of feminine endurance which makes you so frequently impose upon yourself the unendurable, Miss Silverthorne."

"You are quite mistaken," replied Dagmar with natural, and therefore pardonable, indignation, "in supposing that I see Mr. Claude Forrester so often, because it is any pleasure to me to do so; I merely do it in order to influence for good—if I can—anyone who is so prejudiced and misguided."

"Of course, Miss Silverthorne; feminine unselfishness is as proverbial as feminine endurance! But I am nevertheless somewhat relieved to hear that you do not agree with all Mr. Forrester's opinions."

"Agree with them? I should think not! I don't agree with a single one—I wouldn't do so for anything; and the irritating thing is that all the time I know they are right."

Octavius was unable to reply to this, as at that moment he was poised above the ditch on the other side of the road.

"I wouldn't mind agreeing now and then with a man if I knew he was wrong," Dagmar went on, more to herself than her companion; "but a man who is always right—and who you know is always right—and who knows himself that he is always right—is too aggravating for anything!"

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Rainbrow, when he was once more trotting quietly by the side of his uncle's fiery steed, "the young man may learn wisdom by experience. He may even become wise enough to be wrong sometimes." (A height of wisdom to which the speaker himself had never attained.)

But the young lady shook her head. "No, he won't. Nobody ever learns anything by experience."

"Pardon me, Miss Silverthorne, I consider experience the only accredited teacher. *Experientia docet*, as the Latins have it." Among his many accomplishments, Octavius professed to be a great classic. Therefore he never used any English word if he could remember a foreign one that would serve his purpose equally well.

"Well then, it isn't. I've never learnt a single thing from experience, unless I knew it before the experience began."

Octavius smiled the smile of the superior. "Still, your experience has as yet been limited, dear friend."

"Not in some things; and the more experience I have had, the less it has taught me. For instance, I've written the menus for aunt Charlotte's dinner-parties ever since I was a little girl; and I've never written one without having to look in the dictionary to see how many *l's* there are in filleted soles. I don't know even now how many there are, and I never shall!" Dagmar added with triumph.

"Well, dear Miss Silverthorne, let us turn away from such trifling matters as menus and Forresters and filleted soles, to higher subjects; let us talk about ourselves. And that brings me to the object of my visit to you to-day. I want you to obviate the possibility of Claude Forrester or any other man coming between us, by uniting your lot indissolubly with mine. I want us to be one in fact as we are one in spirit—one in heart as we are now one in mind."

"Do you mean to say that you want me to marry you?" Dagmar was nothing if not direct.

"That is the dearest wish of my heart."

"Well then I couldn't possibly do such a thing, so it's no good worrying about it any more."

Octavius started as if a jug of cold water had suddenly

been overturned over him ; but fortunately the horse did not notice this action, but hiccoughed cheerily along. "I do not quite grasp your meaning," gasped the swain.

"I only mean that it is absolutely absurd to think of my marrying you, so we'd better drop the subject at once and talk of something pleasant," replied Dagmar, with the utmost amiability.

Octavius exhibited distinct annoyance. "There may be reasons against your marrying me, Miss Silverthorne—though I confess that at present I fail to perceive them ; but I cannot see wherein the absurdity of the suggestion lies."

Dagmar began to laugh. "Can't you really ? Well then, if you can't, it is no good my trying to explain it to you. If you don't see a joke at once, you'll never see it ; nobody ever does."

"Pardon me, but an offer of marriage is not a joke."

"Not all of them, perhaps ; but a good many are. And this seems to me a particularly funny one."

"I am unable to perceive the humour of the situation, although my unusually keen sense of the ludicrous is one of my most distinguishing characteristics."

Dagmar, with much affability, proceeded to make the joke plainer. "If you could only see yourself, Mr. Rainbrow, you'd see at once how funny you are. I'm sure you would."

Octavius drew himself up with as much dignity as his uncle's horse and his own meagre inches would allow. "There is nothing despicable in the devotion of an honest man, Miss Silverthorne ; it is the crown and the completion of every woman's existence. I am no false lover, believe me—no fickle knight who loves and rides away."

This was too much altogether for Dagmar's gravity ; she burst into a peal of girlish laughter. "I never for a moment thought you were, Mr. Rainbrow. You don't

look much like loving at the present minute ; but you look still less like riding away. But if you like to try it, I don't mind giving you a leg up."

Now six months ago—before the Forresters had ever set foot in Dinglewood parish—Dagmar would no more have dared thus to gibe at the art critic of the *Morning Sunset* than she would have dared to blaspheme ; which effect of the baleful influence of Claude was not lost upon Mr. Rainbrow, and was resented accordingly. To find that his especial young woman looks at him through another man's eyes, is a most unpleasant experience for any mother's son.

"Then do I understand, Miss Silverthorne, that you refuse my offer of marriage ?"

"Of course. What else could you expect me to do ?" replied Dagmar, with the callous cruelty of extreme youth.

"Then I think I have a right to inquire the reason of this refusal. Is it my religious views to which you so much object ?" Octavius always plumed himself upon his scepticism, which was of that simple and childlike blend which blindly accepts anything which does not happen to be true.

Dagmar opened wide her violet eyes in sheer amazement. "Good gracious, no ! Whatever would a man's religious views have to do with marrying him or not ?"

The face of Octavius slightly fell. It would have been a great gratification to him to regard himself as a martyr to his own unfaith. "Then you do not object to my religious views ?" he asked, still hoping that the reply would be in the affirmative after all.

"Oh dear, no ! Not in the least. Besides, I don't know what they are."

Then Octavius did well to be angry. "Not know what they are, Miss Silverthorne ? That I cannot understand ! I am no servile hypocrite—no sanctimonious liar

—and I have explained to you often enough the reasons why my intellect refuses to accept what is known as revealed truth."

"I know you have," replied Dagmar penitently; "but I never listened. I didn't understand that you expected me to."

"Did not expect you to listen! Then what do you suppose I talked to you for?"

"For your own pleasure; it never occurred to me that you were doing it for mine. I'm really most awfully sorry to have been so stupid, Mr. Rainbrow. But I never listen when people talk about their opinions on religion and politics and books, and difficult subjects of that sort—not even when Aunt Charlotte does, or any other very clever man."

The girl's apology was evidently so sincere that Octavius had no option but to accept it. "Then if it is not my religious views, is it my profession to which you object?"

"Oh dear, no; How could I? I think it is splendid to know enough about art to be able to write about it; although I consider it much cleverer to do things yourself than only to write about what other people have done." Again Octavius felt the trail of young Forrester over Miss Silverthorne's ideas and conversation.

"Then is it my position, or my lack of worldly possessions?"

"Certainly not. I shouldn't care how poor a man was if I was in love with him. I think love in a cottage would be the greatest fun in the world. I should simply adore it! And I shouldn't mind a bit if the cottage were a yellow brick villa, or even married quarters in barracks."

"Then if it is not my views or my profession or my poverty that you object to, may I ask what it is? I think I have a right to know why you have refused me so

summarily." The horse seemed to think so too, as it ambled along quite peacefully now.

But Dagmar did not agree with it or with its leader. "I'd rather not tell you, Mr. Rainbrow, and I shan't."

"But, dear friend, you must. I have a right to know."

"And I've a right to keep it to myself. And my right is as good as yours, and better, because I'm a woman."

"Then, Miss Silverthorne, I throw myself upon your mercy, and supplicate you to enlighten me as to the cause of my rebuff."

This humble appeal slightly shook Dagmar's determination. "I'm afraid there isn't much that you'd call mercy in it," she said doubtfully.

"Never mind. Tell me, whatever it is. I am a man, and men must ever be strong to wrestle and to endure. Tell me, I beseech you."

At this Dagmar succumbed. "Well, then, if you will have it, it's the shape of your nose."

Octavius fairly jumped. "The shape of my nose? Why, what has that to do with the matter?"

"Everything. Much more than your religious views or your social position."

Mr. Rainbrow felt that the female sex was indeed incomprehensible. "But I do not understand how the shape of a man's nose can affect the sort of husband that he will make."

"But it will affect the sort of wife that his wife will make if he marries her; and I couldn't—I really couldn't—be a nice, pleasant, agreeable wife to any man if I didn't get on well with his nose."

"But you would get accustomed to it in time, whatever shape it was," argued Octavius.

Dagmar sighed. "I know I should, and that's the dreadful part of it. I should see it opposite me at breakfast every morning of my life. It would be bad enough

always to have the same nose for breakfast even if it was a beauty; but if it wasn't—oh! I couldn't stand it at any price—really and truly I couldn't."

Octavius stroked the offending feature in sorrow rather than in anger. "So that is where I fall short of your standard, is it, Miss Silverthorne?"

"Oh! not *short*, Mr. Rainbrow; certainly not *short*. It's so much too long; that's my difficulty." And real regret and sympathy shone in Dagmar's beautiful eyes.

There was a pause in the conversation. Then, with an almost superhuman effort, Octavius thrust his foot into the near stirrup, and hoisted himself up once more on the back of his uncle's horse. He knew when he was beaten—he was clever enough for that; and he realized that though a man may be the architect of his own fortunes, the plan of his own face is not submitted to him until the building is practically finished, and it is too late for him to interfere with anything except the mere furnishing. So he cantered recklessly back to Merchester, not caring for the moment whether he met with a violent death on the way there or not.

Dagmar walked on homewards, feeling really very sorry for her lover and very unhappy in her own mind. She knew she had been cruel, but how could she have helped it? "He made me say the reason," she pleaded with herself, "though I didn't want to; and it isn't his own fault that he is so little and ugly; and he really is very clever in his own way. But all the same, I couldn't live with a nose like that for anything—no, not if you was to crown me, as Mrs. Peppercorn would say."

CHAPTER VII

LOVE'S LATER DREAM

BUT while Claude Forrester and Dagmar Silverthorne were quarrelling gaily along, their two elders were doing anything but quarrel; they were fast falling in love with each other; but were doing it in that peaceable and deliberate manner which is the way of middle-aged lovers as contrasted with the more sudden and more violent methods of the young.

The absolute unworldliness of Luke Forrester's nature appealed strongly to the woman who was always being made conscious by other people of the fact that she was so much richer than most women. He never thought of Miss Fallowfield's fortune; and consequently she never thought of it while she was in his company. Moreover, she had become almost morbid on the point that people merely cared for her for the sake of her money; and therefore she accepted, with the greatest delight, the regard and admiration of a man who so obviously measured his friends by what they were and not by what they had. A woman's instinct is always very keen with regard to the men who are in love with her; and she is rarely, if ever, blinded as to the motives which prompt their love-making.

Sometimes of deliberate purpose she carefully draws a veil over certain things; but she is generally competent to perceive the truth if she be so minded.

Then the culture of Mr. Forrester, and his artistic taste, were very attractive to Charlotte Fallowfield, since to her the intellectual world would always form the larger hemi-

sphere of the universe. So she and her Vicar discussed everything from Shakespeare to musical-glasses; and the more they talked to one another, the more attached to one another did they become.

Charlotte was wonderfully happy just then. She was conscious that she was falling in love with Mr. Forrester and that he was doing the same by her; and there is always something strangely rejuvenating and revivifying in the birth of a new love. Like the dew of the morning and the spring of the year, it is one of those new things which never grow old; but are as fresh every time that they occur as was the meeting of Adam and Eve in Paradise, or as the dawn of that first dayspring when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy.

There was only one drawback to Charlotte's perfect happiness at this time; but she was one of the women who never seem to be quite happy without some kind of a fly to add flavour to their ointment, or some sort of a lion to lend interest to their path. Dear discontented creatures, let us leave them to enjoy their pet flies and lions in peace, feeling assured that if we—in the kindness and ignorance of our hearts—bestir ourselves to remove one of their mountains, they will never rest until they have raised an adequate mole-hill in its place! It is a mistake on our part to try to straighten the crooked and to smooth the rough for natures such as these; for we shall only put them to the extra trouble of finding another crooked place and of manufacturing a fresh rough one; since without a little grievance of some kind it is impossible for them to find peace.

The special crook just now in Charlotte Fallowfield's lot was her jealousy of Luke Forrester's dead wife; she could not forget that his first love, with all its glamour of romance, had been given long ago to a younger and fairer

woman than she. True, she herself had given her early affection to Herbert Wilson ; but she would not have been a woman—and least of all would she have been a woman in love—if she had displayed justice and reasonableness in dealing with affairs of the heart. Love which is tempered by reason is not love at all, but is merely esteem or friendship masquerading in the part. Good enough things in their way doubtless, and warranted to wash and wear ; but having very little affinity with that fire from Heaven which is known by the name of love.

"How beautiful the light of the dying sun always is," remarked the Vicar to Miss Fallowfield. It was an afternoon in early spring, and the two were returning to the village from a long country walk. "I think the land is never so lovely as at sunset."

"But it is the beauty of death and the loveliness of decay." Charlotte would not have been Charlotte if she had not found something wrong somewhere.

"Nay, nay, Miss Fallowfield ; there you are quite mistaken. It is the beauty of life and the loveliness of promise. The secret of the glory of the sunset is that it is the promise and foretaste of a still fairer to-morrow."

"I do not think so. It is rather the beauty or the blessing which brightens as it takes its flight."

But Mr. Forrester shook his head. "I cannot agree with you. Hope is an integral part of all real beauty. The reason why the spring is so fair is that it is the promise of the summer ; the charm of youth lies in the fact that it is the promise of something still fairer and better—the beauty of maturity and the peace of old age."

"I see no beauty in maturity or in old age," replied Charlotte, with a sigh.

"Because you shut your eyes to the hope in them. Do you suppose that the promise, 'at eventide it shall be light,' means just a beautiful old age and nothing more ?

Not a bit of it. It means that a godly old age shall be illumined with that particular light which forms the glory of the sunset—the light which is the earnest and the forerunner of a still lovelier day to come. As a fine sunset invariably prophesies a fair morning, so a beautiful old age invariably foretells a glorious to-morrow, which shall be as this day, only much more abundant. Otherwise the light at eventide would be an untruth; and nature—like the God of nature—cannot lie."

"You have the most cheering and comforting thoughts, Mr. Forrester."

"I am very glad you find them so. I could have no greater happiness than to feel that I was cheering and comforting you. Charlotte, you must know that I love you; will you come to me and be the light of my eventide?" It was characteristic of Luke Forrester that at this moment the thought of Miss Fallowfield's wealth and his own poverty never once entered his head.

Charlotte stood still and held out both her hands. "Yes, if you want me," she replied simply.

The Vicar took the outstretched hands in his own. "I want you as I want nothing else this side Heaven; and, God helping me, I will make you as happy as you have made me."

So Mr. Forrester and Miss Fallowfield became engaged, much to the excitement of Dinglewood and the surrounding neighbourhood. It was indeed a nine days' wonder in the place; and many were the comments passed thereon.

Mr. Duncan was seriously annoyed; and made some unpleasant remarks about parsons rushing in where lawyers feared to tread.

"Parsons always know which side their bread is buttered," he said to himself. Wherein he showed himself singularly ignorant of the subject in hand; for it is in their usual lack of knowledge on this matter, that one of the

great secrets of their influence lies. It is the fashion nowadays to gibe at the clergy for not being good business men or men of affairs. And supposing these gibes have some foundation, so much the better both for the clergy and for the congregations committed to their charge! For the ministers of Christ have their citizenship in Heaven, and so cannot be expected to vie in worldly matters with the ordinary ratepayers of the earth. They have something better to do than to do the best for themselves; they have more important things to think about than the cares of this world. And if now and then we do come across a parish priest who has learnt to differentiate between the buttered and the unbuttered side of his bread, do we reverence him all the more for his practical knowledge? Not we. We rather despise him for such careful rendering to Cæsar of the things which are Cæsar's, when his sacred Office calls him to deal with the things which are God's.

Mr. Duncan was utterly wrong in his criticisms of the Vicar's love-making. It was solely because Luke Forrester did not have his eye upon Miss Fallowfield's fortune, that the fortune—with the possessor thereof—fell into his hands. Mr. Duncan was so anxious to show that he did not care for Charlotte for the sake of her money, that he ended by not showing that he cared for her at all; which merely proved that in his eyes Miss Fallowfield's fortune loomed larger than Miss Fallowfield herself. Persons who are oppressively unworldly, are generally thoroughly mundane at the core; just as persons who are obtrusively polite, are usually intrinsically ill-bred.

Perhaps the people who were most annoyed by the Vicar's engagement to Miss Fallowfield, were his son and her niece; which was but natural. There is always a very strong feeling on the part of the young against any love-making between their elders; presumably because they

regard love as their especial privilege and pastime, and any indulgence in it of older persons as a sort of infringement of copyright. And there is a good deal of jealousy mixed up with the disapproval, youth being always prone to jealousy. As we grow older we begin to have faint glimmerings of a sense of proportion and a principle of justice, and we realize that as only one person can be first with us, so we can only expect to be first with one person ; but in the days of our youth we gaily expect to receive other's gold in exchange for our silver, youth always being more or less egotistic—which accounts for its invariable self-consciousness and also perhaps for its charm.

Therefore Claude and Dagmar were both dreadfully jealous of the middle-aged lovers, for they regarded their respective father and aunt as their own especial property. Of course they both intended, in due time, to supplant this father and aunt by a wife and a husband of their own ; but that was a very different thing from the aforesaid father and aunt thus supplanting them. In their mutual disapproval of this matrimonial arrangement, the young people were drawn closer together than they had ever been before, as at last they had found a subject upon which they saw eye to eye. Mutual approval is a great bond ; but it is as nothing compared with the still closer tie of mutual disapproval. We all like the persons who swell the strain of our own particular Te Deums ; but we positively love those who shout Amen "to our own pet" anathemas.

"I cannot understand how people can trouble their heads about love-making when they are as old as that," Dagmar confided to Claude, as the two were walking in the fields together ; "it must hardly seem worth while to get married when life is so nearly over."

Claude assented with the wonderful freemasonry of a

contemporary. That is the great charm of people of one's own age ; they look at things as a rule so exactly from one's own point of view—which of course is the only reasonable standpoint.

"When I am Aunt Charlotte's age I shall be thinking more of my funeral than of my wedding," continued Dagmar cheerfully ; "I shall feel it so much more appropriate. And, besides, really old people like that can't properly fall in love, do you think ? "

"Of course not." Claude spoke very decidedly.

"And really old people can't properly be fallen in love with, either," Dagmar went on. "I mean that while Aunt Charlotte is too old to fall in love, on the other hand Mr. Forrester is too old to be fallen in love with."

But here Claude demurred. "Oh ! I'm not so sure about that. My father is a very attractive man."

"I'm sure he has been," Dagmar hastened to make peace again, "ages and ages ago ; and as a father I think he is still quite charming, and not at all old. But what comes in quite nicely in a father is a little bit out of date in a lover, don't you think ? Just as what would be quite the right age for a cathedral would be much too old for a frock."

But Claude was obstinate. "Men are so much younger for their age than women, you see."

"Oh ! I don't think so at all. They are much older because they get bald ; and after all they are actually exactly the same age as each other. It is only a question of looks."

"But men keep so much younger in their thoughts and feelings than women do," persisted Claude.

"No, they don't—indeed they don't. Look at you, for instance : you are hundreds of years older than I am to talk to."

"Well, I really am a good deal older than you ; you

are only twenty-one while I am twenty-four. And of course being a man I am wiser."

Dagmar gave a little shriek. "Wiser than me? Why you're nothing like as wise. You are cleverer than me, I admit, but what is mere cleverness?"

"And more grammatical than you, too, I hope," retorted Claude with some bitterness.

"And what is mere grammar—nothing but dry old rubbish? I talk plain English, and don't worry my head about grammar."

"Well, then, I do."

"I know; it's just the sort of thing you would do. You've got such a ponderous mind. There's nothing elusive about you; you're not at all subtle."

"I may not be the thing, but I thank Heaven I know how to spell the word."

"And don't I?" inquired Dagmar, with an angry toss of her head.

"Apparently not. In the last note you wrote to me you spelt it 'suttle.'"

"That's how I always spell it."

"I know; it's just the sort of thing you would do," was Claude's fair retort.

"Anyhow, you knew what I meant; or, rather, you didn't know, because it is the sort of thing you are incapable of understanding."

"At any rate there is one thing that I really am incapable of understanding; and that is how my father ever put any woman in my dear mother's place," replied Claude gloomily, returning to the subject in hand.

Dagmar's passing irritation immediately dissolved into tender sympathy. When Claude talked to her about his mother, she was nearer loving him than she had any idea of. "Yes; I cannot understand that either. I always think it is so beautiful to love once, and so horrid to keep

on doing so. However many husbands I lost, nothing would ever induce me to marry again. I'd rather be lonely for the rest of my life than so lower my ideal."

"So would I." Once more the twain were in sympathy with each other.

"I think it is beautiful to love once and for ever, and then to be unhappy for the rest of your life and never wear anything again but mauves and heliotropes," exclaimed Dagmar; "ever so much more beautiful than marrying and growing stout and living happy ever after."

"Your aunt apparently does not agree with you; and yet her lover died."

"No; she doesn't inherit a lot of my qualities," Dagmar explained; "but my mother did, and I'm just like her. Besides, think of Aunt Charlotte's complexion with mauves and heliotropes; they wouldn't suit her at all, she is much too dark! And then you must admit that she has been a long time marrying, though she has had hundreds of offers."

"Probably she has. Many people would think her a fine-looking woman still."

"I daresay for the last twenty years men have only wanted to marry her for her money; they'd hardly want to marry a woman of over thirty for anything else. But when she was young they liked her for herself, I really believe." Dagmar was magnanimous.

"I hope you do not wish to insinuate that my father wants to marry her for her money," cried Claude in a hurt tone of voice.

"Of course not," was the soothing reply; "you see, he is quite as old as she is, and much plainer, so I'm sure he is capable of really liking her for her own sake. Lots of old men do—Mr. Duncan, for instance." Dagmar was bent in all good faith upon making the *amende honourable*.

"Is Duncan a bachelor or a widower?"

"A bachelor; he always has been, ever since I can remember," replied the girl.

"Well, then, I wish to goodness he'd married her before my father came upon the scene!" sighed Claude, as the two approached the Hall, and the conversation consequently died a natural death.

But it was not among the quality alone that Miss Fallowfield's engagement was freely discussed; the village had much to say upon the subject.

"I can't say as I altogether approve of it," Mrs. Peppercorn announced to her two friends, Mrs. Mawer and Miss Tovey, who happened to be having tea with her; "and yet on the other hand I don't see as I can lawfully go against it."

"For my part I never do approve of second marriages," said Miss Tovey; "I feel nothing would ever induce me to contract a second union myself."

"Time enough to talk about your second marriage when you've accomplished your first, Amelia Tovey," replied Mrs. Peppercorn with some justice.

"And if you've the heart for it then, when you know as much about it as I do," added Mrs. Mawer, "you'll deserve all the misery you'll get; and I can't say anythink stronger than that, marriage bein' what it is, and this world a wilderness o' care."

"But though I don't approve of second marriages," continued the romantic little dressmaker, "I do not wonder at any woman rejoicing in a first. To find a man with a new heart and respectable connections, and to follow him through the world, must indeed be a full cup for a woman."

"Full indeed and runnin' over," murmured Mrs. Mawer with an ominous sigh; "too full for the taste o' some folks. In such cases them as only gets half a cup gets the best of it to my thinkin'."

"I always take such a deep interest in anything con-

cerning love and marriage," said Miss Tovey somewhat wistfully. There are few things more pathetic than the intense interest which single women of a certain age take in all affairs of the heart; but such pathos was lost upon Mrs. Peppercorn. This worthy woman had many good qualities, but subtlety of sympathy was not one of them. "I don't see what call you've got to feel like that, Amelia Tovey," she remarked; "it is no particular concern of yours, or ever likely to be."

Amelia was humble as usual. "Of course it isn't, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear; but I think matrimony is such an interesting subject in the abstract."

"And some folks would ha' been easier if they'd ha' left it there," groaned Mrs. Mawer. "It would have been a sight better for some folks if they'd ha' left it there altogether; but it's no good wishin' you'd not gone out in the rain, after you've got wet through and chilled to your very bone and marra."

"And it's no good going out in the rain without an umbrella," replied the hostess severely, "and then saying you mistook it for fine weather. Those that expect husbands to be angels shouldn't get married at all; they aren't, and they don't pretend to be. And if they were, they'd marry other angels; in which case, begging your pardon, Mrs. Mawer, you'd have remained as single as you'd have liked to be."

"But angels don't marry, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear," argued Miss Tovey, who always erred on the side of taking things too literally.

"Then it's because they don't get the chance, if they happen to be female ones. For my part I don't believe in the women who remain single from choice. I believe they are all part and parcel with the fox who lost his tail and then invented dress-improvers, pretending that he preferred that arrangement."

"But you believe in the women who refuse to marry a second time, because they loved their husbands so much, don't you, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear?"

"I do; but not because they loved their husbands so much, Amelia Tovey; far from it!" was the grim rejoinder.

"Them as the Lord has delivered out o' the house o' bondage, ain't in a hurry to get back into it a second time," added Mrs. Mawer, by way of explanation.

Miss Tovey sighed, "Still, it must be beautiful to have a husband and a house of your own!"

"A house of your own is always a pleasure, I admit," assented Mrs. Peppercorn; "but the husband varies according to circumstances and the length of time as you've had him. When a girl is young and foolish and newly married, she looks upon her house as a background to her husband; but when she's been married for a bit and knows more of the true value of things, she gets to look upon her husband as part of the furniture of the house. I doubt if there's any pleasure more real and lasting than a nice house and good solid furniture, mahogany for preference."

"Of course," Miss Tovey continued in an extenuating manner, "it isn't as if Miss Fallowfield had ever been married before."

The lady of the house shook her head. "It isn't, Amelia; and so the Vicar will find to his cost. If an old man must get married, let him choose a woman that's been married before, and so knows the lie of the land. But a woman that's been her own mistress for close on fifty years!—well, if she doesn't try to be his master, I'm very much mistaken."

"Them as has been married before, are broken in to slavery and sorra," added Mrs. Mawer.

"I hear the wedding is to be in London," remarked Miss Tovey.

Mrs. Peppercorn put down her tea-cup with a crash, so

great was her surprise. "You don't say so, Amelia! Well I never! What a dreadful place for a wedding!"

"Yes, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear; London, and her travelling-dress, and no orange-blossom."

"And quite right too at her age, Amelia Tovey! What call have women of fifty to break out into orange-blossom like Aaron's rod, I should like to know? I'm glad to hear that Miss Fallowfield has so much sense. But to be married in such an awful dangerous place as London, is more than I can stomach—and especially when you've the rest of the world and your own parish church to choose from."

"Then do you know London, Mrs. Peppercorn?" asked the dressmaker respectfully.

"I do, Amelia! only too well. Peppercorn took me there once for a week; and I'll never go there again as long as I live, unless I go in my coffin, which won't be my doing at all or else it wouldn't be done. London! The most shamefully over-rated place I was ever in in all my life. I can't think why people make such a fuss about it; I suppose just because it happens to be the fashion."

"I suppose it is full of sin and wickedness," said Miss Tovey with shuddering interest and fascination.

Mrs. Peppercorn shook her head. "It isn't the sin and wickedness that I mind, Amelia; it's the motor-'buses. They come down on you just as if the drivers wanted to murder you on purpose; which I firmly believe they do; and even if you get into a cab for safety, they are still after you, cab or no cab. Every minute you expect to be your last, and a violent death into the bargain!"

"Dear, dear, Mrs. Peppercorn! I don't wonder as you were upset," sighed Mrs. Mawer.

"I wasn't upset as it happened; but I was always expecting to be. All the while that I was driving in a cab

with Peppercorn, I divided my time between screaming and prayer; so I didn't see much of London."

Mrs. Mawer was still sympathetic. "Dear me, what a to-do! I don't wonder as you felt nervous, Mrs. Peppercorn, as you're just the one to come off badly in an accident. You'd fall heavy, and a shock is always dangerous to stout figures, even if it don't kill them outright; and sudden death always bein' preferable to a long and lingerin' illness, particularly to them as is left behind."

"And it cost me no end in Missions," continued Mrs. Peppercorn, "for I kept vowing that if my life was spared by a particular motor-'bus, I'd give a shilling to the Missions. And you can't think what a lot it totted up to when the day was done."

"I think it was very good of you to pay at all, Mrs. Peppercorn dear," remarked Amelia Tovey, who had a habit of always seeing the best side of her neighbours' actions.

But Mrs. Peppercorn was not to be led into undue spiritual pride. "Not at all, Amelia; it was only my duty to pay it, after having promised; and duty is a thing that I never leave undone. What I owe I always pay; and I'm not one to be in debt to anybody, not even to my Maker."

"I wonder you didn't ride in the motor-'buses themselves," suggested Mrs. Mawer, not without reason; "for surely of the two it's better to kill other folks than to be killed yourself."

But Mrs. Peppercorn shook her head. "Nasty dangerous things, and so top-heavy. I did ride in them once or twice; but I was always jumping about from side to side to balance them, and that came more tiring than walking. And if they do upset, it's a more painful death than a cab, there being so much more broken glass about

to make mincemeat of you, to say nothing of the machinery. Besides Peppercorn passed the remark that if I did want to spend all my time between screaming and prayer, he'd sooner I did it in a private conveyance than a public one. I was less likely to get taken to a lunatic asylum."

"And that would ha' been a sad fate for you and no mistake," exclaimed Mrs. Mawer; "and yet lots o' folks are taken to asylums for far less than that, and kept locked up for the rest of their lives, there bein' no outlet but the grave when once you get inside."

"Well, to my thinking, the folks that are in need of lunatic asylums are the folks that go and get married in London when they've the rest of the world to get married in," replied Mrs. Peppercorn, "such as Miss Fallowfield and our Vicar. It's all very well to make up your mind to get married in London; but if you start to go to your own wedding you'll probably arrive at your own funeral, through having been killed by a motor-'bus on the way."

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

As the time for her wedding drew near, Miss Fallowfield was sorely exercised as to the distribution of her property. She knew that her marriage would involve the making of a Will; but what kind of a Will it was to be, she failed now as ever to make up her mind.

She still intended—after making ample provision for her husband and her niece—to leave the greater part of her vast fortune to charity; but she could not decide the precise charity or charities that she should select for her benefactions.

She longed to discuss the subject fully with Mr. Forrester, and be guided by his counsel, as she felt that in a matter of that kind she could find no more competent guide than he; but he told her plainly that he should not feel himself justified in offering advice upon so important a question without deep and lengthy consideration; and just now—in the full rush of his Lenten duties, and with his marriage immediately after Easter to be arranged and prepared for—he really had not time to give his mind to anything else. Therefore, if she wanted his guidance in the matter, it must stand over until after their wedding, when they would have the leisure and the opportunity to discuss it in full.

The Vicar wished Miss Fallowfield to postpone making any Will at all until together they had arrived at a final decision as to the channels whereby her fortune should eventually benefit her fellow-creatures;

but Mr. Duncan—who was always a gentleman, even if a disappointed one—showed her that such a course would be extremely unfair to her future husband, as there was generally some difficulty and unpleasantness as to the disposal of the property of those who died intestate. If she left no Will at all, and her enormous fortune went to her husband, other claimants—in the persons of distant relations of herself or of the Wilsons—would very likely turn up and try to make things disagreeable for him; and might even go to the length of suggesting that she had made a Will, and that he had made away with it. While if, on the other hand, she disposed of her own property herself, nobody could ever dispute that disposal. Mr. Duncan knew the seamy side of human nature; and he realized how very unpleasant it could be for any man—and most of all for a clergyman—to be exposed to such remarks as were sure to be made if he came into so large a sum of money at the death of an intestate wife. The lawyer insisted upon a Will being prepared before Miss Fallowfield's marriage, and signed immediately after; so that whatever was done with the money, it would be her own doing, and not her husband's.

But what sort of a Will was it to be; and where was the residue of the fortune to go after Mr. Forrester and Dagmar had been amply provided for? They were back again at the old *impasse*.

At last Mr. Duncan suggested a solution of the difficulty. He proposed that Miss Fallowfield should make a temporary Will, bequeathing everything—except the settlement upon her niece—to her husband, and leaving him to dispose of it as he thought right; for by that time Mr. Duncan had seen enough of the Vicar to feel sure that the interests of charity would be quite safe in his hands; and that, as a matter of fact, Mr. Forrester was far more

competent to dispose of Miss Fallowfield's fortune for the benefit of mankind than was Miss Fallowfield herself. Then, Mr. Duncan continued, after they had been on their honeymoon and had had plenty of time to discuss the matter, Mrs. Forrester could make a new and exhaustive Will, in accordance with her husband's counsel and advice.

This course Miss Fallowfield finally decided to pursue; and so the matter was settled for the time being. Had the astute Mr. Duncan known the trouble and expense and general confusion to which his apparently sensible suggestion would lead, he would have bitten his tongue out before making it. But, unfortunately for everybody concerned, he had no premonition as to the results of the course he proposed.

The date fixed for the wedding drew near, and many were the plans that had to be made, and broken, and made up again differently; for Miss Fallowfield had been a single woman far too long to be able to abide by a plan when once it had been settled upon.

There is an old saying that women's promises are made to be broken. That we may be permitted to doubt: but whatever women's promises may be, the remark certainly applies to women's plans—unless the woman is sufficiently young or sufficiently married to be in some sort of subjection to a masculine and law-abiding mind.

At last it was decided that the newly-married pair should spend their honeymoon in taking a trip to Australia, in order to visit a great Exhibition that was being held that year in Sydney, for a show of that kind had always a great attraction for Charlotte. Strange to say, after they had made their arrangements, they discovered that Octavius Rainbrow had taken his passage in the same ship, the *Euroclydon*. The fact was that this young gentleman had felt the refusal of Dagmar Silverthorne more than anyone would have given him credit for; he had felt it so much

that his health had suffered in consequence ; and as the *Morning Sunset* had deputed him to go as its representative to the Sydney Exhibition, his uncle offered to extend his stay in Australia in order that Octavius might forget his woes in a complete change of scene.

The middle-aged lovers were far too sensible to resent the young critic's involuntary intrusion into their honeymoon. On the contrary, Miss Fallowfield was rather glad of the opportunity of showing kindness to a relation of Mr. Duncan's ; for she was enough of a woman to be quite conscious of her solicitor's feelings with regard to her approaching marriage, and to pity him accordingly. And when once a woman begins to pity a man for not having got what he wanted, she will never rest until she has given him something which he never wanted at all. It is the feminine idea of justice.

Further, it was arranged that while the Vicar and his wife were on their honeymoon, Miss Perkins—who had retired from her school on a comfortable competency—should come to Dinglewood Hall to take care of Dagmar until the bride's return. After that the girl was to live on with her aunt as she had done heretofore, and the Vicar, of course, was to make his home at the Hall also ; but Claude was to remain at the Vicarage, and there carry on his profession, provided that there proved to be enough occupation for a rising young architect in those parts. The Vicarage was still to be used for certain of Mr. Forrester's meetings and classes, in order to save the villagers the walk up to the Hall ; for the Church with its tapering spire and the Vicarage under the shadow of it, stood right in the heart of the village, close to the old Roman road ; and the quaint old lych-gates opened straight on to that great thoroughfare which had been a highway even before the foundations of the fourteenth-century Church were laid.

"I do not altogether approve of that young man being alone at the Vicarage after his father has hung up his hat at the Hall," remarked Mrs. Sprott in the bosom of her family; "young men who live alone are so apt to get into mischief."

"I have lived alone for many years and I have never got into mischief," said Theophilus, in a tone which implied that he very much wished he had.

"No, Theophilus," replied his mother; "but you had my early training to support you under temptation, and to brace you for the fight."

"All the same, mother, the temptation was never to anything worse than grumbling and bad temper, and the fight was never against anything more deadly than tough meat and an irate landlady. I could have wished for foemen worthier of my steel; but it was ordained otherwise."

"And how thankful you ought to be that it was," added Mrs. Sprott. But Theophilus was not at all thankful, and did not pretend to be.

"Well, whoever lives to see it, evil will come of this marriage," said Mrs. Sprott. "Ever since Mr. Forrester was appointed Vicar of Dinglewood I've known that there was trouble in the air. People cannot deliberately do wrong and yet go unpunished."

"But I do not exactly see where the wrongdoing comes in, Susanna," suggested Mr. Sprott timidly; "there is nothing wrong in getting married—quite the reverse. In fact the law does everything to encourage matrimony, and permits nothing which interferes with it. And I am sure no one has more cause to speak well of the holy estate than I, my love," he added by way of conciliation, having caught sight of a threatening gleam in his Susanna's eye.

But the gleam was not extinguished by this simple ruse.

"And did you marry me when I was close on fifty and had a million of money, I should like to know?"

"No, no, my love, certainly not, certainly not."

"It might have been better for me if you had," Theophilus hinted darkly; but his mother ignored him, and went on:

"There is no wrongdoing in getting married, Timothy—given of course that the man chooses the right woman. But where the wrongdoing comes in is when people with grave responsibilities trail those responsibilities in the dust, and prove themselves unworthy to wield the power which Providence has entrusted into their hands." Which was Mrs. Sprott's poetical way of expressing her belief that Miss Fallowfield had sinned against light in not entrusting the living of Dinglewood to Theophilus.

"My dear mother, why persist in blaming Miss Fallowfield for what was really decreed by Fate? Do you suppose that a mere woman had any power to change the current of my ill-fortune? She was simply a tool in the hand of some unseen force which has thought fit to compass my undoing. Nay, mother, rather blame yourself for having brought into the world such an unlucky being."

"It is too late in the day to begin blaming myself for that," retorted Mrs. Sprott with some show of reason. "You should have mentioned that forty-one years ago, Theophilus." Here, however, her sweet reasonableness failed her for the moment, as forty-one years ago Theophilus was incapable of speech.

"I expect Miss Fallowfield will leave all her money to that man and his son. Eh, Timothy?" Mrs. Sprott continued.

"My love, my love, remember I am not in a position to give you any information upon that subject," replied Mr. Sprott. Which he certainly was not, as he did not possess any to give. He had assisted in the drawing up

of Miss Fallowfield's settlements, whereby—with the exception of Dagmar's hundred thousand pounds, and a moderate fifty thousand upon Mr. Forrester—all that lady's large fortune was settled upon herself. But the conditions of Miss Fallowfield's Will the head of the firm had seen fit to keep to himself.

"Surely it is your duty to tell your wife everything, Timothy."

"Not professional secrets, my love; certainly not professional secrets." The surest way of keeping a secret is not to know it; this safeguard was Mr. Sprott's.

"It is a fatal error to tell a woman anything," remarked Theophilus.

"Not at all," retorted his mother with some heat. "In my opinion there should be no reserves between husband and wife."

"If there are, they are the sort of reserves that are generally called out in the time of war," said Mr. Sprott, rubbing his hands together with pleasure at his little joke.

But the joke fell upon stony ground, as poor Timothy's little jokes usually did; Susanna and her son were neither provocative nor receptive of wit—were neither witty themselves, nor the cause of wit in others. Yet Mr. Sprott never failed to get in a joke wherever he saw what he considered an opening for one.

"Whenever a man refuses to let his wife know what he is doing or thinking, it invariably means that he is doing or thinking something that he is fully aware she would not approve of," remarked Mrs. Sprott with some wisdom.

"It more often means he is fully aware that, if he did tell her, she would be incapable of keeping it to herself," argued Theophilus.

"She could keep it to herself fast enough if she wanted to," his mother snapped back at him.

"Then, my dear mother, if women possess that power, why do they never exercise it? If you will excuse my saying so, I consider that your want of reserve in showing that you considered me the proper and most suitable man for Dinglewood, militated to a great extent against my appointment."

"Well, I never! Of all the ungrateful——" began Mrs. Sprott; but her son interrupted her:

"I consider that in this case you were the instrument employed by a malignant fate to my undoing. Miss Fallowfield must have had some reason for not doing the right and obvious thing; and she could not possibly have had any objection to me personally; therefore I conclude that something occurred to prejudice her against me; and I can think of nothing but your too outspoken wishes on my behalf. Women can never bear being dictated to by one another."

Here Mr. Sprott endeavoured to smooth matters over. "Come, come, Theophilus, you are mistaken there, I am sure. A mother's ambition on behalf of her son cannot ever be anything but a beautiful and ennobling spectacle."

"Not if it is carried to such an extent that it becomes a source of destruction." Theophilus was not to be gainsaid.

But his mother knew better than to argue with him; she wisely changed the subject. "The question is, to whom will Miss Fallowfield leave all her money now that she is married? I doubt not that that young Forrester will eventually get the lion's share."

"Fortunate young man to have a wealthy stepmother!" exclaimed Theophilus, in a tone of voice which conveyed the impression that it was entirely the fault of Providence that he himself was not similarly blessed. As indeed it was.

"Well, anyhow, I did my duty in the matter," said

Mr. Sprott. "I spoke plainly to Mr. Duncan and told him that in my opinion at any rate the lady's fortune should be settled upon herself, so that during her lifetime neither her husband nor his heirs could meddle with it." Mr. Sprott had done nothing of the kind; the head of the firm had said very much the same thing to him, and he had meekly acquiesced. But this was his idea of repeating a conversation *verbatim*.

As a matter of fact it was the bridegroom himself who had insisted upon this settlement, backed up by Mr. Duncan. Although, owing to the Married Women's Property Act, her husband could not touch Miss Fallowfield's fortune without her consent, the Vicar wished it put out of even her own power to impoverish herself for him or for anyone else during her lifetime. Mr. Forrester did not care an atom for his wife's wealth; he never thought about it unless it was brought directly under his notice; but when it was, he desired to make it plain to her and to everybody else concerned, that he was marrying her for love and not for money.

As the time of the marriage approached and as her attachment to Luke Forrester increased, Charlotte's jealousy of her predecessor grew stronger and stronger. She was incapable of ever being absolutely happy; some natures are; but she might have selected a grievance which adequately fulfilled its nature of a grievance and yet was not the obsession which her jealousy was fast becoming. The more she learned to know and reverence the almost ideal character of the man who was to be her husband, the more did she hate the memory of the woman who had been his first love; and the happier she grew in the knowledge of all that Luke Forrester was to her, the more did she allow this hatred to fling its shadow over her happiness. Latterly she could hardly bear to look at the beautiful picture in the dining-room at the Vicarage,

so bitterly did she resent its beauty and charm. Sometimes she had wondered why the portrait hung in the dining-room and not in the Vicar's study ; but she had decided in her own mind that this was but another proof of her lover's absolute unselfishness of character ; he wished Claude to share with him the pleasure of seeing constantly that lovely and beloved face.

" I suppose you will want to take that picture up with you to the Hall," she said to Mr. Forrester, when he and she were busy at the Vicarage planning what furniture was to be removed and what was to remain ; and try as she would, she could not hide the bitterness in her voice.

The Vicar gazed at the portrait for a moment in silence. " No, I think not," he replied slowly.

Charlotte looked surprised. " Not take it with you ? "

" No ; it had better remain here. Claude will like to have it."

For a moment Charlotte's jealousy of the mother was turned against the son. How Luke must love his boy, she thought, if he could even give up his dead wife's picture to him ! The next instant she was ashamed of this passing feeling ; but it had been there all the same.

It is vain to imagine that we can indulge in any particular sin of thought or action, and that the matter will stop there. If we open the door to the devil, with the idea that he will enter in and then quietly confine himself to the apartments we have allotted to him, leaving the rest of the house free, we shall find ourselves wofully mistaken ; he will penetrate the place from top to bottom when once he has set his cloven hoof inside. We cannot wilfully sin in one point, and yet keep the rest of our character pure : for the sin will gradually eat into everything, until not a single thought or feeling or quality remains untainted. He that is guilty in one point is guilty in all ; for the guilt infects everything with which

it is brought into contact. We are very fond of saying to ourselves, "I know that I indulge in this one particular form of wrongdoing, but in all other relations of life, thank Heaven! I am free from blame," while we might just as well say, "I admit that I am suffering from scarlet fever and that my feet are infectious; but anybody can shake hands with me with impunity."

Thus Charlotte Fallowfield's jealousy of the first Mrs. Forrester was gradually eating into her character and permeating all her thoughts; and was threatening to warp her whole nature if she did not take care.

But all she said was, "You are very good to Claude."

"I try to be; I am all that he has, poor boy! But I do not know that this is a special sign of my goodness to him, Charlotte."

"I think it is a very special sign," retorted Miss Fallowfield, "to give up to him the portrait of the wife whom you adored! I don't see what could well be kinder."

The Vicar's face grew sad. "You do not quite understand, Charlotte; and I want to make you understand."

"Oh! I understand well enough," replied Miss Fallowfield with an unpleasant laugh. "There is nothing so very incomprehensible in a man's devotion to the wife of his youth and to his only child. The world is full of similar cases." She hated herself for being so disagreeable, and yet her jealousy goaded her on. She knew well enough that nothing slays love so surely as a bitter tongue; yet she could not for the life of her put a curb on her own.

But her lover took no apparent notice of her ill-temper. "You do not know the whole story of my married life, Charlotte, and I wish you to know it. There should be no secrets between husband and wife."

"Still I cannot see that your married life with another woman is any business of mine."

"But it is," replied Mr. Forrester with unshaken

patience. "Everything that has to do with me is your business, just as everything that has to do with you is mine."

Charlotte shrugged her shoulders, and prepared to listen to her lover's rhapsodies over his former wife; but the expression of her face was not pleasant to look upon.

"My first marriage was a mistake," he said slowly; "a hopeless and terrible mistake. I have never confessed as much to anybody before, but I consider that you have a right to know everything about me—even those things that I would rather not tell."

"A mistake? Your marriage a mistake?" gasped Charlotte. "I do not understand."

"There is not much to understand, Charlotte," replied Mr. Forrester sorrowfully; "it is by no means an uncommon experience. I fell in love with a beautiful face, believing that the soul was as fair as the body that it inhabited; but I soon realized my error. My poor wife was not a bad woman, in the accepted sense of the word; but she was utterly selfish and shallow and worldly and frivolous—the worst kind of wife possible for a parish priest."

"And she did not help you in your work?"

"Help me? She hindered and thwarted me in every way she could, and prided herself upon so doing. After I was married, I learned that she had never loved me, but had merely married me for the sake of a home, as she could not get on with her stepmother and so was compelled to leave her father's house and seek shelter elsewhere. After a time I irritated her so much that everything I said or did was a cause of offence to her; and she seemed to set herself to see if she could break my heart. I sometimes think that she succeeded."

Mr. Forrester's face was so sad that Charlotte longed to take him in her arms and comfort him; but shame held

her back. What right had she—with her contemptible and utterly unjustifiable jealousy—to offer consolation to one of the saints of the earth ?

"During her life my home was a very wretched one ; and the shadow of that misery has been upon my spirit ever since. I tried my utmost to make her happy ; but that was impossible, since my very presence and existence were a constant annoyance to her. Sometimes I thought of disappearing out of her life altogether and leaving her in peace ; but things are not altogether easy for a beautiful and flighty young woman who is separated from her husband ; and, after all, she was the woman whom I had sworn to love and to cherish. And then there was Claude. A man may not shirk his responsibilities simply because they have become irksome to him."

"Does Claude know that you were not happy together ?"

"No. Nobody knew but she and I, and now you ; nobody else had a right to know. And at the time of her death the child was too young to have noticed anything."

"And you never told him ?"

Mr. Forrester passed his hand over his forehead as if in weariness or perplexity. "No ; in looking back I am not sure that I did right ; but at the time it seemed to me that even if the boy had lost his mother in one sense, he need not lose her in another ; and I decided that he should not lose her twice over. Though the actual mother had gone, the ideal mother should remain to be a guide and an inspiration to him all his life. There is nothing so sacred to a man as the memory of a good mother ; and I had not the heart to take that source of comfort away from my motherless boy."

"Oh ! you were right, quite right," exclaimed Charlotte, her face now aglow with enthusiasm and love.

But the Vicar shook his head. "I am not sure. I

think perhaps it is always better to tell the truth at all costs, whatever the risks may be; but at that time I believed that I was doing the best thing for Claude in telling him much fictitious good of his mother, and in letting her become the ideal of perfect womanhood to his youthful mind. A man may think evil of his wife and be none the worse for it spiritually; he may know of her wrongdoing, and yet find himself and his love for her unchanged. But I do not believe that any man can know of his mother's wrongdoing without being in some way the worse for it—without losing something which nothing can ever bring back. And therefore it is incumbent upon women who are called to the sacred Office of motherhood, to be careful not to fall short of the mark of their high calling; like the ministers of God, if they do so, they are guilty of sacrilege as well as of sin."

"I am quite certain that you did right," Charlott repeated.

The Vicar sighed deeply. "I hope I did; anyway I did it for the best. But I sometimes fear that I shall be counted among them that say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'; and in this shall be judged as a sinner."

CHAPTER IX

MANY WATERS

LUKE FORRESTER and Charlotte Fallowfield were duly married after Easter at that little Sanctuary hidden away in one of the narrow streets leading from the Thames to the Strand; that Sanctuary which was once the private Chapel to a great palace, and is now all that remains of the noble pile raised by an Italian prince on the river banks, and made beautiful by him in order that he might therein forget his banishment from the sunny skies of Italy—the Chapel Royal of the Savoy.

After the quietest of weddings the newly-married pair started off on their journey to the Antipodes; and Claude and Dagmar—the latter suitably chaperoned by Miss Perkins—returned to Dinglewood, there to possess their souls in patience until the bride and bridegroom should come home again.

Telegrams and letters duly announced Mr. and Mrs. Forrester's progress from one port to another; which missives occasioned much intercourse between the Hall and the Vicarage. Whenever Dagmar heard from her aunt, she felt it incumbent upon her to show the letter to Claude without any unnecessary delay; and he felt just the same towards Dagmar whenever he received a communication from his father. Having once formed this conception of their duty to each other, it was beautiful to see how these two young people were set upon amply fulfilling it. Even in the minds of those onlookers who considered the idea itself a somewhat exaggerated one,

the young couple's perseverance in carrying it out could not fail to excite approval and admiration.

And naturally the conversation of Miss Silverthorne and Mr. Forrester junior did not confine itself to the news of their wandering relations; they discussed—as they had discussed heretofore—every subject under the sun, unadulterated—in the splendid confidence of youth—by any chance ignorance of the matter in hand which might have hampered more mature conversationalists.

Architecture was one of their favourite themes; that is to say, it was Claude's favourite; and Dagmar, like a true woman, fell in with his mood. The woman who talks to a man about what interests her, rather than about what interests him, is either a born old maid or else supremely happily married.

"Of all the arts, I consider architecture the highest, because it is the one most closely allied to religious faith." It was Claude who made this sapient remark.

"Oh! I don't agree with you," Dagmar would hardly have been Dagmar if she had. "Think of music and painting, and all the Madonnas and oratorios; they are quite as sacred in their way as abbeys and minsters. Smaller, of course, but quite as religious."

"Nevertheless you will find, if you study the subject, that the ages of architecture have been the ages of faith; and that as soon as faith grew dim, architecture became debased. Faith was a living force in the Middle Ages; and look at the minsters and cathedrals of that day! At the present time faith is not much more than a dead letter; and now we can hardly build decently a parish church."

"I must allow that new churches aren't to be compared with old ones for looks," Dagmar deigned to admit; "though I don't think they are quite so draughty."

"They are not to be compared with old ones because

the faith of to-day is dim compared with the faith of yesterday. Of all the arts architecture is the one in which, metaphorically speaking, it is most necessary for the artist to work on his knees. Temples made with hands must be temples indeed, or else they sink to the level of concert halls and public libraries."

"A good many London churches look just like concert halls. I mean those carpeted, drawing-roomy churches, that never seem quite the thing for Sunday use. Now St. George's, Hanover Square, is just the place for weddings, but I don't think it would be at all suitable for a religious service," said Dagmar with quite unconscious irony.

"You mean the Georgian churches, which were built when religion was at a lower ebb than it even is to-day. Which just proves my point. Faith was at its darkest in the eighteenth century; and architecture at its worst at that time. Since the Evangelical Revival and the Tractarian Movement, faith has again revived, and consequently architecture has improved; but as yet we are, alas! far from the simple belief and the glorious architecture of the pre-Reformation era!" And Claude sighed as he thought of the days that are no more.

For the first few weeks after Miss Fallowfield's wedding, life at Dinglewood went on in a pleasing and peaceful fashion, enlivened by accounts as to how the travellers were faring; for after Claude and Dagmar had duly devoured the epistles from foreign parts, these documents were read aloud at the weekly sewing-party by Mrs. Sprott, with those pregnant pauses at the more private portions whereby readers of letters invariably stimulate the curiosity of their hearers; and with those frequent interpolations of the expression "Something" whenever the caligraphy of a word was difficult to decipher, whereby such readers irretrievably confuse the sense of that which they are reading: for it was thought desirable that the sober and

godly matrons of the parish should have their minds enlarged by the recital of their Vicar's experiences.

But suddenly these communications ceased.

"It seems funny that there has been no news of Mr. and Mrs. Forrester the last week or two!" was Miss Skinner's comment on this inexplicable silence.

"I expect they are so much wrapped up in each other—being on their honeymoon—that they've no time to write letters," exclaimed Miss Tovey. "I know if I was on my honeymoon I should be so occupied with happiness that I should never find time to write a single line."

"And nobody would find time to read it if you did," remarked Mrs. Peppercorn; "so everything would be for the best in that case."

"If your honeymoon was anythink like mine," said Mrs. Mawer, "everythink you wrote would be blotted out with tears droppin' on it, through Mawer not knowin' when he'd had enough, and it's bein' Bank Holiday and all the publics open."

"Besides," continued Mrs. Peppercorn, ignoring the last speaker and still bent on the confounding of Miss Tovey, "if Mr. and Mrs. Forrester had been as foolish as you, Amelia, they'd never have written at all. Which they have done regular up to now. But my experience is that however much folks are wrapped up in each other in their love-making days, there's nothing like marriage for unwrapping them. And it's a pity you were never unwrapped in that way, Amelia, and taught a bit of common sense."

Whereby the good lady enunciated an obvious fact, but she failed to see the underlying meaning of it. It is true that there are no such unromantic people as the happily married; but that is because they have found something even better than romance. For those who are single, and for those who are not happy in their

marriages, the Sleeping Beauty still hides in the heart of the enchanted forest, though it has not been permitted to them to find and awaken her ; for them the glamour still lurks in the depths of the woodland, and the brier-rose still weaves its magic spells. But to those more fortunate fairy princes who have penetrated into the hidden castle and kissed the princess, the magic and the mystery are over, and something infinitely better has come in their place ; to these happy souls the enchanted forest has been changed into a pleasure-garden—the spellbound castle into a home.

For, as the dear old fairy-tale so truthfully tells us, as soon as the prince kissed the princess and woke her, he set in motion all the domestic machinery in the castle, and woke everybody else up also ; the clocks began to strike and the cocks to crow, and the turnspits to turn the joints at the kitchen fire. And is it to be supposed that none of the pipes had frozen in all those hundred winters ; or that in all those hundred summers none of the roots and stems of the brier-rose had stopped up the drains ? Not a bit of it ! Surely the castle must have grown shockingly out of repair during that long slumber, and the royal bride and bridegroom must have had their hands full for a long time in putting it into proper repair again. And then they would have to make a clearance in the magic forest for a croquet-lawn and a tennis-ground, with perhaps a large kitchen-garden in the rear ; and the brier-rose would have to be pruned and trained over trellises and espaliers, and the moat cleared out and examined by the nearest borough analyst ! And what time would they have for romance ?

Nevertheless, the prince and princess would be far happier than they had ever been in their lives before ; and would be full of pity (mingled with a little good-natured contempt) for all the other princes and princesses who

were still respectively searching and slumbering in their various enchanted forests. For to them it had been given to find that domestic peace which is better than the most thrilling excitement, and that intimate companionship which is more satisfying than the most enthralling romance. All of which was quite undreamed of in Mrs. Peppercorn's philosophy.

"I think Miss Skinner is right," remarked Mrs. Sprott, "and that it is indeed strange that there has been no news of Mr. and Mrs. Forrester for several weeks. Let us hope that nothing untoward has occurred to the happy pair!"

Mrs. Mawer uttered her accustomed groan. "No news is generally bad news, as far as my experience goes. If folks are well and happy, they've no objection to mention the same on a post-card. But if they're sick or sorry, they haven't the heart to put pen to paper; and if they're dead, they can't. Which I always say to any of my friends as don't hear from their relations when they expect to, 'Mark my words, there's somethink dreadful happened, and you'll hear it in good time, and sooner than you want to, bad news always travellin' apace!' And it usually turns out as I'm right, the air as we breathe bein' full o' sorra, and darkness the end of all things."

"Come, come, Mrs. Mawer, we must not take such a gloomy view as that. We must trust in an overruling Providence, even in cases where the designs of that Providence appear to have been thwarted." By which enigmatical sentence Mrs. Sprott desired to express her broad and charitable belief that, although Providence could not be expected to bestow such care upon the present Vicar of Dinglewood as would have been bestowed had that Vicar been Theophilus himself, still even the supplanter of Theophilus was not outside the limits of a somewhat modified Divine protection.

But Mrs. Mawer shook her head. "Mark my words,

no news is bad news all the world over, and the ways o' Providence more mysterious on the water even than they are on dry land."

"Not a bit of it," retorted Mrs. Peppercorn. "If Providence can take care of folks in the streets of London, with all them dreadful motor-'buses flying about, He can take care of them on the sea. In fact it seems to me an easier job to do so, there being more space to escape from one another, and not so many bumps about. And I hold that as Mr. Forrester and Miss Fallowfield came back alive from their wedding—which I never expected them to do from the moment that I heard they were to be married in London—I see no reason why they shouldn't travel in safety round the world."

"Nor I, Mrs. Peppercorn," said pious Mrs. Paicey; "it seems as if they had been specially spared for some particular work, as you may say."

"It does, Mrs. Paicey. And if Providence means to spare folks He'll spare them, in spite of all the motor-'buses in Christendom, to say nothing of storms and tempests." With which bold confession of faith Mrs. Peppercorn threw such a defiant glance at Mrs. Sprott that the latter could find no ready retort, and so lost a valuable opportunity of reproving her foe and improving the occasion.

The working-party was not the only place where anxiety was beginning to be felt on behalf of the bridal pair. At first neither Mr. Duncan nor the two young people took much notice of the sudden cessation of letters; but as the days and weeks passed without bringing any further news of the wayfarers, the three began to grow alarmed. Then their anxiety was increased by the notification in the newspapers that the *Euroclydon* had not touched at any port, nor been sighted by any other vessel, since she left Colombo. Great indeed was their distress at receiving this disquieting information; and Claude went up to

London to see if he could learn anything more from the owners of the missing ship. But in vain. So their agony of suspense and fear grew greater day by day; until one sorrowful morning when Mr. Duncan had to ride over to Dinglewood and break the sad news to his two young clients that the owners of the *Euroclydon* had just received a cable saying that a merchant-ship had discovered the remains of that ill-fated vessel floating about in the Indian Ocean, with no sign of life upon her. There seemed now, alas! no doubt that the *Euroclydon* had been capsized by one of the sudden and violent storms which infest those latitudes, and that all on board had perished.

At first Dagmar was utterly prostrated by the blow; and Claude did not fare much better. But after a short time the glorious vitality and elasticity of youth asserted themselves, and the two were able to see Mr. Duncan with regard to their business affairs—which just now were highly startling and important.

Dagmar looked very sweet and childish as she received Mr. Duncan; and Claude's handsome face was white and drawn. There was something rather touching and pathetic in the sight of the two young creatures left so utterly alone and with such grave responsibilities crowding upon them; and the kindly heart, which Mr. Duncan kept concealed under a somewhat stiff and stately manner, softened to them at once. He made up his mind that henceforward he would do all in his power to help them both in the difficult path which was opening out before their inexperienced feet.

But perhaps the one who was the most altered by the shock was Mr. Duncan himself. His imposing figure seemed to have shrunk and grown shorter; and some of the keenness had faded out of his grey eyes. In his way the lawyer had been very fond of his nephew, and had intended to make Octavius his heir; so that he

felt the young man's death as a real sorrow. And he also considered himself in a way responsible for it, as it was he who had urged Octavius to take the trip, and had provided him with funds to extend it. Moreover Mr. Duncan had loved Charlotte Fallowfield ever since the far-off days when she first came to him and asked him to help her in the management of her newly-acquired fortune; and the fact that he had never loved her quite as much as he loved himself (otherwise he would have put his false pride in his pocket and married her) did not prevent his having loved her a good deal. Although he would not ask Miss Fallowfield to be his wife, she had been for many years his closest and dearest friend; and it is hard to lose friends at Mr. Duncan's age, and still harder to replace them.

We all learn as we get older that the manufacture of new friends grows less and less easy as the years roll on. We still make them now and again, but not as we made them in our 'teens and twenties, when the doing thereof was but as child's play. It has become uphill work. With a great sum of tact and trouble and sympathy and effort we nowadays obtain the freedom of friendship; but the friends of our youth were free-born. A considerable and exaggerated amount of sentimental nonsense is floating about the world with regard to first love and the like; but there is something in it after all. And what applies to first love applies still more to first friendship—to those delightful and unbreakable ties which we formed before there "passed away a glory from the earth," and things "faded into the light of common day." There is and always must be a certain glamour about Love, wherever and whenever we may happen to meet him. Even if we ourselves be old and weary, we shall still catch something of his atmosphere of eternal youth; although it is doubtful whether the fairy princes will be quite so fairylike, or the sleeping beauties quite so fair, if we meet them upon the

western slopes after we have crossed the brow of the hill, as they would have been had they greeted us on our upward way in the rosy light of the morning. But about friendships made in middle-life there is no glamour at all. Esteem there may be, and affection and confidence and sympathy; but there is none of that silvery halo and that golden haze which enveloped the friendships of our earlier days. It is when we say to them, "Do you remember?" that we prize our friends the most.

The fact that the friendly bond between Reginald Duncan and Charlotte Fallowfield had been formed when they were both still on the sunny side of thirty, made the death of Mrs. Forrester an irreparable loss to Mr. Duncan. To him she was still the clever and handsome and somewhat discontented girl who had come to him for wise counsel and guidance; just as to her he had never been anything else but the stately and courteous and competent young lawyer, who was sensible enough to fall in love with her but not quite sensible enough to tell her so.

Of the three people gathered together in the cheerful morning-room of the Hall—that room where Charlotte Fallowfield had so often entertained her friends with excellent tea and still more excellent conversation—the one most in need of comfort and yet the least likely to receive it was Mr. Duncan. The room was so full of memories of Charlotte that he could hardly bear to remain in it: every picture and every piece of furniture seemed to bring him some sort of a message from her. For Miss Fallowfield had been abundantly endowed with the quality called personality. She might sometimes have been discontented, but she was never dull; and it is the people who are never dull that leave the most yawning gaps behind them when they pass on from this stage of existence to another. Even though Dagmar was still there

in the plenitude of her youth and beauty, Dinglewood Hall seemed empty without Charlotte's vigorous presence. As long as she was in it, the big house was full and cheerful enough ; but the mistress being dead and gone, every room appeared vacant and deserted.

"I have come to talk over some business with you both," said Mr. Duncan, when the three were seated, and Dagmar had wept her little weep at seeing him. "They are very important matters, and cannot be allowed to stand over any longer."

"I'm glad you've come," said Dagmar with a sob ; "you can tell us what to do. I can never do anything without being told ; and now that Aunt Charlotte is gone, I don't know who is to tell me."

"I cannot tell you what to do, my dear child ; you are of age, and so must settle that for yourself. But I shall always be ready and willing to give both to you and to Forrester any help or advice in my power."

Claude thanked the lawyer, while Dagmar mopped her eyes.

Mr. Duncan cleared his throat and went on : "I must first explain matters a little. You will probably know, Miss Dagmar, that your aunt could never quite make up her mind how to dispose of her large property. She had not yet done so at the time of her marriage. So, acting under my advice, she made a temporary Will, leaving everything to her husband."

"What is a tem—temporary Will ?" asked Dagmar with a little catch in her voice.

"It is a Will which is not intended to stand permanently, but is merely made to bridge over the interval while another and a lasting Will is in course of preparation. Your aunt intended to talk over the question fully with her husband, and then on her return home to make a Will disposing, as he and she agreed was right, of her vast

fortune. In the meantime she made a short Will leaving everything to him; so that—in case anything happened to her before she made her further Will—she could give him her instructions as to how finally to dispose of the property. I think I may say," added Mr. Duncan, turning to Claude, "that this proves what a very high opinion I entertained of your lamented father. I knew that the slightest wish expressed by his wife would be as binding upon him as an Act of Parliament, even though so large a sum of money was at stake. He was one of the few men I have met in my life whom I trusted absolutely."

Claude's eyes filled with tears, but he could not speak.

"But I never foresaw," Mr. Duncan continued, "such a catastrophe as this which has occurred. Otherwise I should naturally have offered very different counsel."

"Why?" asked Dagmar. "I don't see that Mr. Forrester being dead makes him any the less trustworthy."

"Of course not, my dear young lady; who suggested such a thing? But the difficulty is this: if Mrs. Forrester survived her husband, the Will lapsed and she practically died intestate; in which case all her property reverts to you as her next of kin: but if, on the other hand, Mr. Forrester survived his wife, the property became his, and now goes to his son, as his direct heir. And the question is, which of the two died first?"

"But they both died at the same time," argued Dagmar.

"Practically so, my dear child, but hardly identically. And if one survived the other by a few minutes, that would alter the disposition of the property."

Claude rose from his seat. "But it would be absurd for the money to come to me, who was nothing at all to Mrs. Forrester, and not to go to her own niece who was like a daughter to her! I cannot see that the point admits of argument."

"But the law does, my dear Forrester; and by the law we must stand or fall."

"But supposing I decline to take the money, and insist on handing it over to Miss Silverthorne?"

"You can neither decline nor insist until it is yours. Then you can do what you like," replied Mr. Duncan.

"But surely I can resign my claim to it?"

"Not until you have a claim to resign; neither can you hand over to Miss Silverthorne what is legally her own. The question to be decided is, does the fortune belong by right to you or to her? When that is decided, you and she can settle the matter between you as to what becomes of it."

"Nothing would induce me to touch what I consider legally belongs to Miss Silverthorne," persisted Claude.

"If it does belong legally to Miss Silverthorne, nobody will ask you to touch it," replied Mr. Duncan quietly; "the question is, to whom does it legally belong? By the way, I ought to tell you that the hundred thousand pounds settled upon Miss Dagmar goes to her all right; and the marriage-settlement was so worded that the fifty thousand settled upon your father comes to you. The difficulty is about the remaining eight hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

"Well, whoever gets it, it will all have to be spent in charity. Aunt Charlotte always said it would," remarked Dagmar; thereby giving the first blow to Claude's determination not to accept the money.

"Will it?" he asked quickly, his face suddenly aglow; for across his mind there flashed the possibility that at last his most cherished day-dream might come true, and his fairest air-castle assume material form.

"Of course. I've heard Aunt Charlotte say hundreds of times that she should leave every penny she had to charity, and that a hundred thousand pounds was all I must ever

expect from her, because she didn't want me to be married for my money. And I might be all the same, she said, as that is quite a large fortune for a woman, but she couldn't bear to feel that I hadn't enough to eat." And Dagmar wept afresh at the memory of her aunt's thoughtful kindness.

"But I must make it clear to you both," explained Mr. Duncan, "that there is nothing in Mrs. Forrester's Will to that effect; and a wish merely expressed in words has no legal standing. Therefore it is not binding upon either of you that the bulk of this fortune shall be devoted to charitable purposes. It will belong absolutely to the one of you which inherits it, to do with it exactly as he or she may choose."

"Well, I don't think that's fair," exclaimed the girl. "Surely people can do what they like with their own!"

"Certainly, my dear young lady. That is what I am trying to explain to you."

"Then Aunt Charlotte had the right to give all her money to charity if she wanted to."

"Certainly she had; but she did not avail herself of that right. All the law has to deal with is the Will as it stands; and in it there is no mention of any legacies to charity."

"But surely Miss Silverthorne is right," said Claude; "and my step-mother's heir is bound to carry out my step-mother's wishes."

"Not unless he or she may choose to do so. There is nothing compulsory in the matter."

"I should consider myself so bound were I to succeed to the fortune," added Claude, wavering still more in his decision to hand the same over to Dagmar. Imagination works swiftly; and already his day-dreams were assuming a tangible shape.

"And so should I. I know exactly what I should

spend it in. I've often built castles in the air—how I should lay out a fortune in charity if I'd one to lay."

"Oh! you can't have made up your mind already as to the best way in which to expend a fortune such as this," expostulated Claude, who had already made up his.

"Yes, I can. I've always had lovely schemes of how I could make hundreds and hundreds of people happy if only I'd heaps and heaps of money."

But here Mr. Duncan stayed the tide of argument. "It will be time to think and talk about how the money is to be spent when we know who will have the spending of it."

"And how will you find that out?" was Dagmar's pertinent question. "If nobody knows whether Aunt Charlotte or Mr. Forrester was drowned first, who is going to tell us? And besides, I believe that everybody in a wreck is so fussed that they don't really know themselves who is drowned first." And once more the girl began to sob at the picture which her words conjured up.

Mr. Duncan patted her hand kindly. "There, there, my dear, don't cry, don't cry. The matter will have to be tried before the Probate Court, and it will adjudicate the fortune as it finds the law directs in cases such as this. But whether in the eye of the law you or Forrester is the rightful heir, I have not the slightest idea. That only time will show."

CHAPTER X

THE COMMENTS OF DINGLEWOOD

THE Dorcas meeting which was held in the week following the announcement of the wreck of the *Euroclydon*, was thrilled to its very foundations by the sad news. It was of no use for Mrs. Sprott to take the *History of the Prayer-Book* out of her reticule and wave it aloft in an inviting manner : the meeting had so much to talk about that it meant to talk, and would not put up with reading aloud. At the present moment Dinglewood was far more interested in the end of her Vicar than in the beginning of her Church ; and she intended to discuss that end without let or hindrance. So Mrs. Sprott—who in spite of her many limitations was not altogether devoid of wisdom—decided to make a virtue of necessity ; and to lead a movement which she was powerless to stem. As long as she was the general in command of an army, she did not mind what that army was fighting for. She could march in any direction, provided that she led the forces.

"We are all so greatly upset by this terrible news," she remarked, "that it is useless to attempt reading aloud this afternoon. Our minds are too full of sorrow and regret to be able to assimilate any extraneous information."

"We are indeed," added Mrs. Higginson, ably seconding her friend; "I do not know when I have been so much distressed ; certainly not since the death of the late Lord Oversight, one of dear papa's most valued patients." (The deceased nobleman's stud-groom had purchased from the departed chemist all the drugs used in the stable

department.) "But as the Doctor used so often to say, 'Accidents will happen to all, even to the most gifted.'"

"Not such bad accidents as this though," objected Mrs. Peppercorn; "or else nobody would be alive outside of Noah's Ark."

Mrs. Mawer sighed her customary sigh. She was always so depressed, even when nothing was the matter, that she found it difficult to augment that depression when anything was. "It is the lot of all," she remarked, "and we must all come to it sooner or later; and the happier we seem at the time, the more likely the blow is to fall." If that were true, the speaker appeared likely to enjoy immunity from blows for some time to come. "See what all that rejoicin' and givin' in marriage has ended in! Death and destruction and the grave. When I see folks happy and smilin', like as poor Miss Fallowfield was, I says to myself, 'Smiles is made to be washed away with tears.' And so it is, and so it ever will be, this world bein' what it is and a wilderness o' care."

"Well, anyway, there are a good many marriages that don't end in destruction and the grave," replied the lady of the house, who was in an argumentative mood; "at least not for some forty or fifty years."

But Mrs. Mawer refused to be cheered up at any price. "And better if they had, Mrs. Peppercorn, better if they had! There are plenty o' marriages to which destruction and the grave would be a pleasant change; such as my own, if you'll excuse my mentionin' it."

"Then I hope Mr. Mawer found it so," replied Mrs. Peppercorn; "as he was the one that tried it." Whereat Mrs. Mawer subsided for a moment.

"Ah! the ways of Providence are indeed inscrutable and past finding out," remarked Mrs. Sprott, in a tone which implied that she herself could soon explain these mysteries if she tried; and would proceed to do so on the

slightest provocation. "But from the moment I heard that poor Mr. Forrester had been appointed Vicar of Dinglewood, I felt that trouble was impending. I did indeed."

"I can quite believe that," retorted Mrs. Peppercorn; and there was the sound of battle in the air.

"For three afternoons running I saw a shipwreck in my tea-cup," remarked Miss Tovey; "at least, I wasn't quite sure at the time whether it was a shipwreck or a letter from foreign parts; but this proves it to have been a shipwreck."

"I always think a shipwreck must be a most distressing and appalling experience," said Mrs. Higginson. "People are rarely the same after it."

"Very rarely, particularly if they happen to be drowned," was Mrs. Peppercorn's apt reply.

"And even if they survive, the shock seems to tell upon the system," Mrs. Higginson continued. "As dear papa used to say, 'If you fall out of a railway train or a carriage, you fall upon dry ground; but if you fall out of a ship, you fall into the sea.' And one feels how true that is upon occasions such as this. It seems to increase the danger tenfold."

Here the revolutionary Miss Skinner put in her oar. "In a shipwreck there is no respecter of persons. Miss Fallowfield, with all her money—or I should say Mrs. Forrester—was drowned the same as everybody else. Money is no use when the end comes."

"Still, it often helps to postpone the end a good bit," suggested the hostess; "and it's no use pretending that it doesn't."

"Not in the case of shipwreck, Mrs. Peppercorn. The sea is a true democrat and takes no account of wealth."

"Then it is different from a good many folks, Emma

Skinner; that's all I can say. But I wasn't referring to shipwrecks when I spoke."

At this point in the conversation the sentimental side of little Miss Tovey rose to the surface and found vent in words. "Just think! By this time Miss Fallowfield will have met her old lover again, the one who left her all that money. I do wonder which she will love best in Heaven—him or Mr. Forrester."

"That's just the sort of thing you would wonder, Amelia Tovey," remonstrated Mrs. Peppercorn with marked disapproval; "and what I wonder is that at your age you haven't got more sense. Your mind's always running upon love, and things of that kind; and I consider it downright irreverent to mention them at such a time as this. As if folks hadn't something better to do in Heaven than to love one another!"

"But Saint John is always telling us to love one another, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear," pleaded the little dressmaker.

"I'm not dealing with Saint John, Amelia, I'm dealing with you," replied Mrs. Peppercorn, as if at some future time the beloved Apostle had still to be dealt with by her; "and I repeat that it's a great pity you haven't something better to occupy your mind than folks loving one another. But that is the worst of old maids—they're so sentimental. You don't find married women bothering their minds over love and fal-lals of that kind; they've something more important to think about."

"But I don't think there is anything in the world more important than love, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear."

"Then it's a great pity you don't; that's all I can say!" And the hostess looked extremely severe.

"I hope it isn't wicked of me," continued Amelia humbly; "but I can't help thinking about Mrs. Forrester and her old lover, and wondering what she is doing now,

and whether she likes best to be with him or with the Vicar."

"She may like to be with both," admitted Mrs. Mawer; "she wasn't married to either of 'em long."

The literal Amelia corrected her. "She wasn't married to the one at all."

"Then she may be pleased to meet him again; you never can tell. But it wouldn't be any comfort to me to believe as I should come across Mawer again in Heaven; not any comfort whatsoever."

The hostess hastened to console her. "There's no fear of that, Mrs. Mawer, not from any point of view; so I wouldn't make myself uneasy on that score, if I was you."

Here Mrs. Paicey, who had hitherto been content with listening, joined in the conversation. "I always think that one of the greatest comforts in a trouble of this kind is the beautiful things that are said about the deceased in the local papers. To read about Mr. and Mrs. Forrester in the papers, now that they are gone, makes you feel as if they were perfect saints and always had been, and that it was a treat for us all to have known them."

The hostess agreed with her. "Quite right, Mrs. Paicey; you never spoke a truer word. And to my thinking, if folks didn't wait till their friends were dead before they said all the pleasant things about them, the world would be a sight better than it is. Give me a kind word while I'm here to listen to it, rather than a whole page of palaver in the local paper when I'm dead and buried."

But Mrs. Paicey did not altogether approve of Mrs. Peppercorn's lack of sentiment. "Still, all the same, it's a comfort to be praised up in the papers, so to speak—and especially for them as is left behind. I'm sure when my sister Jane died—Mrs. Tilley as was—there were the most beautiful notices of her both in the local paper where she

was living at the time, and in the one at our old home. And lest there should be any mistake as to who she was, it put 'Tilley *via* Turpin,' Turpin as you know being our maiden name."

"Very gratifying, Mrs. Paicey; very gratifying indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Sprott with her most patronizing air.

"Not so gratifying to Jane herself as if they'd put 'Tilley *via* Turpin' in the papers when she could read it and enjoy it with her own eyes," persisted Mrs. Peppercorn.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Miss Tovey, "I've gone and mislaid the reel of number eight cotton, and can't find it anywhere! Do you happen to have it, Mrs. Paicey?"

"No, Miss Tovey; I'm working with number seven, it being rather stronger, as you might say."

"Then where can it be? I'm sure I put it back again on the table when I took my last needleful. Oh dear, oh dear! I'm always such a one for mislaying things."

"Folks as let their minds run upon love generally mislay things," was Mrs. Peppercorn's severe comment. "Look under the table, Amelia."

"I have, and it isn't there."

"Then feel in your pocket."

"It couldn't possibly be there, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear; I never put reels of cotton in my pocket."

"Never mind; feel," replied the inexorable one.

Miss Tovey obeyed the stern mandate. "Well, I never! Here it is in my pocket the whole time. Whoever would have thought of finding it there?"

"I did," replied Mrs. Peppercorn.

"I must have slipped it in with my handkerchief by mistake."

"I'll give you a piece of advice, Amelia Tovey, which will come in useful when you mislay things," said Mrs.

Peppercorn ; "if there happens to be a place where that thing couldn't possibly be, that's the place where you'll find it."

"There seems nothink but loss and sorra in the air," sighed Mrs. Mawer ; "first the Vicar's shipwreck, and then Amelia's cotton, and goodness only knows whose turn it will be next !"

Mrs. Sprott could not miss this opportunity of improving the occasion. "Still, a great deal of the loss and sorrow in the world is our own fault and therefore avoidable. If Miss Tovey had put the cotton back in its proper place on the table instead of in her pocket, it would never have been lost at all ; and if my dear son had been made Vicar of Dinglewood, as he ought to have been, Mr. Forrester would never have met Miss Fallowfield, and so they would not have been drowned upon their honeymoon."

Mrs. Peppercorn hastened to agree with her enemy ; and whenever she did this there was always danger abroad. "Quite so, quite so, Mrs. Sprott ; you never spoke a truer word in your life. Mr. Theophilus isn't the one to be drowned on his honeymoon, and it's no use pretending that he is."

The good lady's tone was so full of hidden meaning, that lurid thoughts darted through Mrs. Sprott's mind as to the proverbial immunity from death by drowning enjoyed by such as are reserved for another and a more notorious fate. So she inquired with some asperity: "And pray what do you mean by that, Mrs. Peppercorn ?"

"No, offence, ma'am ; no offence, I'm sure. All I mean is that Mr. Theophilus isn't likely ever to have a honeymoon, and so he isn't likely to be drowned on it."

"And why isn't my son ever likely to have a honeymoon, I should like to know ?" The maternal spirit was up in arms on behalf of Theophilus ; hence its owner fell into the error of giving an opening to her opponent.

"Because he isn't the one to take a fancy to a girl who hasn't got a penny of her own; and a girl who has got a penny of her own isn't the one to take a fancy to him." And Mrs. Peppercorn smiled the smile of the conqueror.

"It is very strange," remarked Miss Skinner, "to think that all that enormous fortune of Mrs. Forrester's had to be left behind, and that she couldn't take a single penny with her."

"It would have been stranger still if she could, Emma Skinner," retorted the lady of the house.

"As I said before, money makes precious little difference at the end," continued Miss Skinner unabashed.

"But it makes a good deal at the beginning and in the middle."

"That is so, Mrs. Peppercorn; which makes me wonder what unworthy and undeserving person will get the benefit of Miss Fallowfield's fortune."

"Not you, I'll be bound, Emma Skinner."

"I should not presume to suggest such a thing, Mrs. Peppercorn," replied the postmistress, haughtily.

"Then why trouble your head about things that don't concern you, and are never likely to? You are as bad as Amelia Tovey in your own way."

"Still, it would be very interesting to know who will get all that money," said Mrs. Paicey. "Paicey passed the remark only yesterday that it would be a rare fine haul for somebody."

"And so it will," added Miss Skinner; "a far finer haul than any one person deserves. I don't hold with the way money is divided in this world; everybody seems either to have too much or too little."

"And it's generally yourself that has too little, and other folks that have too much," said Mrs. Peppercorn.

But here Mrs. Sprott carried the conversation along broader and less personal lines. "It is very surprising and

very sad how often it happens that these very large fortunes have no direct heir to inherit them. I have noticed how frequently very wealthy people have no family to whom to bequeath their large fortunes and estates; while on the other hand more impecunious persons are blessed with numerous and thriving children. Which teaches us the lesson that there is compensation in all things, and that happiness is more equally distributed than we are apt to think it is."

Mrs. Peppercorn was up in arms at once. She always was, when Mrs. Sprott delivered an opinion *ex cathedra*. "For my part I don't see anything very surprising in folks who are drowned on their honeymoon not leaving a family behind them—nor very sad either!"

Mrs. Sprott distinctly sniffed. "You misunderstand me, Mrs. Peppercorn; you misunderstand me entirely."

"Well, Mrs. Sprott, I'm sure I hope I do."

Mrs. Higginson once more came to the support of her friend. "You are quite right, dear Mrs. Sprott. My lot has been cast so much among the titled and wealthy classes that I too have not failed to observe how often noble titles die out and large estates are broken up for want of a direct heir. As my dear papa, the Doctor, would often say, 'After all your son is your son, while your nephew is only your nephew'; and one realizes that more and more when one sees how difficult it is for people to select an heir to their possessions outside of their circle of relatives if there doesn't happen to be one in the direct line."

"Well, anyway, talking of nephews, there is Miss Silverthorne," suggested Mrs. Paicey; "and I always think that your sister's children are almost the same as your own."

"Are they indeed, Mrs. Paicey?" cried Miss Tovey, as ever athirst for more knowledge concerning the region

of the affections. "Now I never should have thought of that myself, for, anyhow, your brother's children aren't."

"They are not, Miss Tovey; they are quite different, as you might say."

"And why is that, Mrs. Paicey, dear?"

"Because they are the children of another woman, so to speak, and brought up according to the notions of their mother's family; while your sister's children are brought up with your ideas and notions."

"How very, very interesting! How I should have loved to have had a sister whose children were brought up with all my ideas and notions."

"Then they'd have been very funnily brought up, Amelia Tovey, that's all I can say." Mrs. Peppercorn was always severe on poor Amelia.

"However much you may try to love them, your brother's children seem to belong to quite a different family; they are not a bit like children of your own." Miss Tovey sighed rather wistfully. She had a married brother living in Merchester, with a large and struggling family, who alternately tried to get money out of her and ignored her altogether. Her sister-in-law was an abiding thorn in the flesh to poor Amelia, who was endowed with the very doubtful blessing of a refinement far above her class and her surroundings. Like Mrs. Peppercorn, Mrs. Thomas Tovey had no patience with Amelia's sentimentality; but while the former lady snubbed with the dignity of an elder and a life-long friend, Mrs. Thomas merely snapped with the impertinence of an unsympathetic contemporary.

The hostess pronounced judgment. "If there's one woman in the world more than another who doesn't know how to bring up a family, that woman is your brother's wife; and you'll find this is true all the world over, whoever you are and wherever your brother has married."

"Your son's wife isn't much better, according to what I've heard say."

"That is as may be, Mrs. Paicey. Sons' wives sometimes do what they ought to, and sometimes they don't; but brothers' wives never can do the right thing, and never will do the right thing as long as the world stands; which nobody knows better than I do, Peppercorn having four sisters, not one of whom has ever grudged time or trouble in putting me straight."

"There are very few women at all who know properly how to bring up a family," said Mrs. Sprott, in the tone of one who recognizes herself as one of these rare exceptions; "very few indeed. It is so difficult to understand what are the excellent gifts that we should most earnestly covet for our children. For my part, all I prayed for for my son was neither rank nor riches, but that he might be blessed with an understanding heart."

"And I'll be bound," replied Mrs. Peppercorn, "that you were far too sincere a Christian, Mrs. Sprott, to have your faith shaken in any way by the fact that your prayer wasn't answered; as the faith of some folks is if their prayers aren't all 'reply paid.'"

Mrs. Sprott was not altogether pleased at this tribute to her piety, and did not appear so; but all she said was, "And I can say truly, with a heart full of thanksgiving, that my son has never been to me anything but a source of joy."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," replied her enemy with a sigh of satisfaction. "Some folks are easily pleased. And very thankful they ought to be that they are, or there wouldn't be much pleasure for them in this life."

"I think it is a great gift to be easily pleased," cried little Miss Tovey; "and people who are easily pleased are always so much the most pleasant to live with. I've noticed that men who are easily pleased make much nicer

husbands than men who aren't. If ever I'd have married, that's the sort of man I should have liked."

"And that's the sort you would have got, Amelia Tovey," replied the hostess with grim humour.

Here Mrs. Paicey lifted up her voice once more. "Well, all I can say is that I hope Mrs. Forrester has acted fair by Miss Silverthorne, for a prettier young lady I never set eyes on. And her own sister's child and all, as you might say, and so nobody has a better right to it, having no children of her own."

"But after all, a husband has more claim than even a niece," cried Miss Tovey, who was always strong on the conjugal duties.

"And what good will that do him when he is at the bottom of the sea?" argued Mrs. Peppercorn.

Mrs. Mawer sighed as usual. "And the safest place for him to be, in nine cases out o' ten!"

"I agree with Mrs. Paicey," said Mrs. Sprott, "in hoping that dear Miss Silverthorne will inherit the greater part of her aunt's vast fortune." The maternal imagination works quickly; and already Mrs. Sprott had apportioned Mrs. Forrester's fortune to Miss Silverthorne, and Miss Silverthorne in turn to Theophilus. She saw him in her mind's eye reigning at Dinglewood Hall, and dispensing Miss Fallowfield's million, with a bishopric and several other ecclesiastical adornments thrown in.

"And supposin' she does get it," asked Mrs. Mawer, "what will it bring her but sorra and misery, all of us bein' born to trouble as the sparks fly upward? I remember there was such rejoicin's as never was when my cousin, William Stubbins, came into a legacy o' three hundred pounds on the death of an uncle on his mother's side; and that very week he caught bronchitis on the chest, and never was the same man afterwards to my thinkin'."

"Well, for my part, I think a little legacy does one a

lot of good," said Mrs. Peppercorn; "seems to cheer one up a bit. At least I know I felt all the better for my Aunt Lavinia's five hundred pounds."

But Mrs. Mawer shook her head. "And what are feelin's, Mrs. Peppercorn, in the case o' stout figures such as yours? Nothink but vanity and lies. Why only two days before Mawer was took with his last illness, he felt better than I've ever known him, and enjoyed a hearty meal of roast pork with kidney beans, washed down with a pint o' best bitter. And a week after that he was gone! But that's the way with them stout ones—here to-day and gone to-morra—which I'm always thankful as I was a bit of a scarecrow, with all respect to yourself, Mrs. Peppercorn, the world bein' what it is and life so uncertain to them as are stout."

"Well, anyway, I managed to outlive my Aunt Lavinia's legacy, and I trust I shall outlive a good many more if it's all the same to you, Mrs. Mawer," replied Mrs. Peppercorn cheerfully; "and I trust Miss Dagmar will be able to do the same. She was a wonderful woman was my Aunt Lavinia; as thrifty as never was. She was nurse in a nobleman's family, and used to dose the young lords and ladies with senna tea as regular as if they'd been ordinary flesh and blood. And what senna was left over she took herself, so as not to waste a drop, she was that thrifty. The consequence being that she saved a nice little fortune in her time; which she never could have done if she'd been one of your extravagant folks that waste their substance on riotous living, and pour senna on the ground like water."

CHAPTER XI

THE DISPOSITION OF THE PROPERTY

GREAT was the interest felt on every side when the conditions of Mrs. Forrester's Will became known. The general opinion of the neighbourhood was in favour of the lady's niece inheriting the lady's fortune ; but, as Mr. Duncan was for ever pointing out, the question was not as to what ought to be, but as to what actually was ; not whether the money should or should not belong to Miss Silverthorne, but whether it did or did not belong to Claude Forrester.

Of course there was the obvious solution that if only the young people would fall in love and marry each other —and what is easier to the young than to fall in love and marry, if only they get the chance ?—the matter settled itself ; and this solution found favour in the eyes of the more romantic and sentimental members of the community. But though the Law may be an ass, the Law is not a sentimental ass ; and the Law insisted that the worldly goods should be properly apportioned, before they could be duly disposed of at the hymeneal altar.

Although Mr. Duncan could see clearly that from an outside point of view the equitable decision seemed to be that Dagmar should come into all that her aunt had left and should inherit as next of kin, he knew that the matter must be decided according to what the Will said, and not according to what the neighbours thought ; and he also knew that to leave her niece in possession of this vast fortune was the last thing which his old friend intended. Many

and many a time he blamed himself for having suggested the temporary Will as a way of tiding over the difficulty until the matter could be finally settled; and many and many a time did he regret the fatal and feminine habit of procrastination, which had prevented Miss Fallowfield from disposing of her own property before ever Mr. Forrester came upon the scene.

There was no question as to either side being left penniless, or else Mr. Duncan would have felt very differently. Had the loss of her aunt's fortune consigned Dagmar to poverty, or even to limited means, the question would have assumed other and different proportions; in that case it would have been a burning injustice —whatever the Will might have said—to deprive the girl of a fair share of Miss Fallowfield's money; and Mr. Duncan would have fought tooth and nail to save his fair young client from an injustice so gross. But it did nothing of the kind. As it was, the girl was amply provided for—as amply as her aunt had ever intended her to be—and, if the truth must be told, as amply as Mr. Duncan thought desirable for any unmarried woman. The bitterness occasioned by Miss Fallowfield's wealth, both in her own mind and in the mind of her would-be suitor, had left its indelible trace on the character of Mr. Duncan: he could not forget that had Charlotte been poorer, he would have been a happy man and she a happy woman; and therefore he was in no particular hurry to inflict upon the niece the burden which had marred the life of the aunt.

On the other hand, Claude's pecuniary position in no way appealed to him for sympathy. The fifty thousand settled upon Mr. Forrester was an ample provision for the young man—and a provision, moreover, to which he was in no way entitled save through his step-mother's generosity. So that Mr. Duncan could not make up his

mind as to the course which he wished events to take. All he saw was that the only thing to be done was to refer the matter to the Probate Court, and to abide by its rendering of the terms of the Will. And this course he accordingly took.

"I shall be glad when this matter of the Fallowfield estates is settled," he remarked to his head clerk; "very glad indeed."

"Just so, sir, just so," responded Timothy, rubbing his hands together in his usual obsequious manner when addressed by the head of the firm.

"But whichever way it is, it will be in direct opposition to the wishes and intentions of the testatrix; as she would have highly disapproved of either of those young persons having sole possession of so large a property."

"Just so, sir, just so," repeated Mr. Sprott.

"I blame myself principally, as it was I who suggested to Mrs. Forrester to make a temporary Will leaving everything to her husband, and then to give him full instructions as to what to do with it if she happened to die before disposing of it herself."

"And most excellent advice, Mr. Reginald, if you will excuse my saying so! Who is more competent to advise a woman than her own husband, I should like to know?" demanded Timothy, who had never enjoyed this marital privilege. "And who more suitable than a clergyman to give advice as to charitable objects? For Miss Fallowfield —or I should say Mrs. Forrester—never made any secret of the fact that she intended to leave the bulk of her fortune to charity."

"Certainly, Sprott; as you say, the late Miss Fallowfield never made any secret of her intentions. And I admit that the impression which Mr. Forrester had made upon me was so favourable—I considered him a man of such sound judgment and high principles—that I could

think of no one more fit and proper to offer advice upon this matter than he, quite apart from his being the lady's husband."

"Quite so, sir, quite so. Just what I should have felt myself if I had been in your place."

"And I should have been right in the ordinary course of events," continued Mr. Duncan; "but who could have foreseen that both Mr. and Mrs. Forrester would be drowned upon their honeymoon?"

"No one, sir, no one at all. It is a most unusual conclusion to a wedding trip—most unusual, and I think I may add, most unfortunate."

"But after all, Sprott, we have to deal with things as they are, and not with them as they would have been had we seen the end from the beginning and acted accordingly. There is no manner of doubt that nothing would have induced Miss Fallowfield willingly to leave her entire fortune to either Dagmar Silverthorne or Claude Forrester; and there is also no manner of doubt that one or other of those young persons will inherit that fortune. The question is which of them it will be."

"Exactly so, sir; you have put the matter into a nutshell."

"I believe that great lawyers have differed," Mr. Duncan went on, "as to who is the survivor when a husband and wife are drowned together; and it has been argued that as a man is physically stronger than a woman, so he would struggle longer in the water before he succumbed; or that if he could swim and his wife could not, the probability is that—if only for a few minutes—he would be the survivor."

"Yes, sir, yes, sir; I catch the point of the argument. But it seems to me an unsatisfactory conclusion, if you will pardon my saying so. It would depend so much upon the respective sizes of husband and wife." Timothy could

not conceive of any circumstances in which his Susanna would not struggle longer than he.

Mr. Duncan's eye twinkled. He felt that the multitudinous seas would have their work cut out for them if they attempted to silence Mrs. Sprott; and that a whole ship's crew—let alone her gentle little husband—would submit to the inevitable before that excellent lady succumbed. "Yes, of course their respective sizes would have something to do with it," he admitted.

"And also," added Mr. Sprott sadly, "the fact that women seem to cling to life so much more than men do."

"Tut, tut, Sprott, I don't know about that! That again I think varies according to individual cases. Now the late Vicar was as tall for a man as his wife was for a woman, though she was stouter that he. But that of course would still bear out my point; the stouter one would sink the sooner."

Mr. Sprott, however, sighed and shook his head. "There is plenty of struggling power in some of the stout ones," he murmured, visions of his Susanna's indomitable thirteen stone floating before his mind's-eye.

"And there is no reason why Forrester should not cling to life," continued Mr. Duncan; "a man just married, and doubtless happy in his marriage."

"Very possibly so, sir; some are," was the married man's ominous reply.

The single man laughed outright. "Come, come, Sprott, you are getting too much of a cynic altogether!"

Timothy smiled a faint smile of gratification. There is not a man living who does not feel flattered at being called a cynic.

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Forrester could swim?" Mr. Duncan asked.

"Yes, sir, now you recall it to my mind, I do. He was remarking one day to Theophilus that every man ought to

learn to swim ; and offered to give him a lesson himself at the Merchester swimming baths."

"And I know that Mrs. Forrester could not," added Mr. Duncan. "She has frequently complained to me that in her young days girls were not taught things of that kind, and has bitterly regretted it, and rejoiced that Miss Dagmar had been educated so differently. Nevertheless," he went on, growing serious again, "I cannot help feeling that the shorter the married life of a couple has been, the less claim they have upon each other's property ; and in the case with which we are now dealing the couple were actually upon their honeymoon."

"Certainly, sir, certainly ; on their honeymoon, as you say. And although you cannot expect the Law to take such personal matters into consideration, I agree with you that the longer a man has lived with his wife, the more compensation he is entitled to expect when her property comes to be divided."

"Well, Sprott, I did not exactly put it in that way ; but practically that is what it amounts to, I suppose." And Mr. Duncan laughed once more.

"And, of course, sir," continued Mr. Sprott, "Miss Dagmar has a far greater moral claim than young Mr. Forrester upon the late Mrs. Forrester's fortune. He was absolutely nothing to the deceased lady, while she was an adopted daughter."

"Precisely, my dear Sprott. But the Law has not a keen eye for moral claims ; it deals with things as they are, and not with things as they ought to be ; and I should not be surprised—even after taking into consideration the fact that had Mrs. Forrester died intestate, Miss Silverthorne would undoubtedly have been her next of kin—if the Courts decided in favour of young Forrester. And especially after taking into consideration the fact that Mr. Forrester could swim and his wife could not."

By that time the claims of the 5.23 had become so imperative that Mr. Sprott was compelled either to flee incontinently from his employer or to miss it; and he chose, as usual, the former course, leaving Mr. Duncan much edified by the bird's-eye glimpses he had obtained of the domestic life of his head-clerk.

But had he heard that head-clerk's own account of the interview he would hardly have recognized it.

On Timothy's return to the bosom of his family, he found Mr. and Mrs. Higginson were being entertained at his Susanna's hospitable board; and he was only too glad to have so large an audience to listen to the recital of his trivial round.

"I suppose nothing has been settled as to who is to have Miss Fallowfield's fortune," inquired Mrs. Sprott, when the meal was well under way.

"No, my love, no. The Courts have not yet given their decision upon that important matter."

"Well, I can only say that if the Law Courts give that fortune to young Forrester, I shall wash my hands of them for the rest of my life," remarked Mrs. Sprott. "It will be the most iniquitous thing I ever heard of!"

"Hush, my love, hush! We must not speak disrespectfully of our great national institutions," argued Timothy in a soothing voice.

"I shall speak disrespectfully of whom and what I like, Timothy; and I shall not tender respect where respect is not due. And if you think that there is anything respectable about Law Courts that take away the legitimate bread of an orphan girl and give it to an impertinent young man who has no claim upon it, I can only say that I do not agree with you."

Timothy quailed. He always quailed when his wife said she did not agree with him. It was one of Mrs. Sprott's favourite battle-cries.

"As I was remarking to dear Mrs. Sprott the other day," said Mrs. Higginson, "my connection with the aristocracy has shown me how rarely these large estates and fortunes go in the direct line. So often in the case of Church property it means a family curse or something equally interesting; and I recall once reading a most beautiful poem—by Sir Walter Scott, if I remember rightly—about property which was doomed never to descend from father to son, because somebody threw a baby behind the fire."

Here Mr. Higginson burst into a loud guffaw. "Lor, Matilda, how you do run on to be sure! Your mind's full of nonsense and poetry and play-acting and the like. But I'll be bound that neither Mr. Forrester nor Miss Fallowfield ever threw any babies behind the fire; they weren't that sort; you may make your mind easy on that score." Like all good husbands, Mr. Higginson regarded his wife as a source of considerable amusement tempered with awe—a sort of combination of *Punch* and the *Prayer-Book*.

"Samuel, pray do not be coarse. Miss Fallowfield's fortune may originally have been Church property," persisted Mrs. Higginson; "which would account for its not going in the direct line. As dear papa used to say, 'What belongs to the Church belongs to the Church;' and I feel now how true that is."

At the words "Church property" Mrs. Sprott had pricked up her ears. She felt that matters were being carried into her own domain. "I never heard of Miss Fallowfield's fortune being Church property; and I think I should have been informed of it if it had been. Besides it came originally from America, where they have no dear Established Church as we have here."

"I recall the case of dear papa's friend, Lord Undergrowth," said Mrs. Higginson; "his estates were origin-

ally confiscated from the Church at the time of the Reformation, and in consequence never passed direct from father to son; in addition to which the family were troubled with the ghost of a monk or a nun—I forget which, and it really does not much matter, their ghosts being very similar in dress and appearance—who always frequented the larder and stole a good deal of the game. At least if you can call it stealing, when the game originally belonged to it in bygone ages."

"Stuff and nonsense, Matilda! I don't deny that the game was stolen, but it was no ghost that stole it." Mr. Higginson had but little belief in the supernatural.

"Nevertheless I do consider that Miss Fallowfield's fortune is in a way Church property," said Mrs. Sprott thoughtfully, "because the living of Dinglewood was not given as it ought to have been to Theophilus. In fact, according to my ideas, Miss Fallowfield sinned as much against the Church when she deprived my son of the living of Dinglewood, as Henry the Eighth did when he dissolved the monasteries. Therefore we cannot be surprised if her property does not descend in the direct line."

That Dagmar was not in the direct line never seemed to occur to either Mrs. Sprott or Mrs. Higginson. They apparently regarded the line of inheritance as of the same nature as the knight's move in chess.

"But I shall consider it a burning shame," continued Mrs. Sprott, "if the Law Courts decide the matter in favour of that young Forrester; and I shall make no secret of my opinions. If the Law desires my respect, it must deserve it. But what does Mr. Duncan think, Timothy?"

"Well, my love, as it happens I spoke to him about the subject this very day. In fact, I went into his room for the purpose of doing so. 'Sprott,' says he in his usual affable manner; he was always affability itself, was Mr.

Reginald: 'is there anything you want to say to me before catching the 5.23?' 'Sir,' says I, 'I want to know your opinion on the subject nearest our hearts at the present moment, the disposition of the late Miss Fallowfield's fortune.' I should have said Mrs. Forrester's, but I always think of the departed lady as Miss Fallowfield, and always shall."

"I wonder she did not retain her maiden name," remarked Mrs. Higginson; "I always think it a most *distingué* thing to do when the lady has property of her own. It is ever a source of regret to me that Mr. H. did not adopt the patronymic of Fitzwilkin on our marriage."

"Well, I shouldn't have done that if your fortune had been ten times what it was, and that's flat," retorted Mr. Higginson with much decision. "And besides, Matilda, it was plain Wilkinson in those days, if you remember; the Fitzwilkin nonsense hadn't come to the surface."

Mrs. Higginson did not pursue the subject. Like all true snobs there was nothing she so much dreaded as research into the past.

"Go on, Timothy," commanded Mrs. Sprott. She felt no interest in the reminiscences of the Higginson family.

"'I have been thinking, Mr. Duncan,' I said, 'that once in a similar case to the one under consideration, it was argued by most distinguished lawyers that in the case of a shipwreck, a husband would naturally survive his wife; because, having the stronger physique, he would struggle longer in the water before he finally succumbed.' Also I pointed out to him that Mr. Forrester could swim, while the lady could not; which was a point upon which the lawyers had laid great stress."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Sprott. "What a pack of nonsense!" (Considering that the worthy woman weighed thirteen stone and stood five foot six in her stockings, while her husband weighed nine stone six and stood

five foot three, it must be admitted that to her the argument seemed hardly convincing.) "That is just the sort of thing a lot of silly men—be they distinguished lawyers or not—would think when left to themselves," she added, with unmeasured scorn.

"You see, my love," explained Timothy, "the whole thing depends upon whether Mr. or Mrs. Forrester was the survivor."

"And a most ridiculous thing for it to depend upon, considering that it is a thing that nobody knows and will never be able to find out!" Mrs. Sprott's scorn increased in intensity.

"Why can't they use their own common sense," asked Mr. Higginson, "and give Mrs. Forrester's fortune to Mrs. Forrester's next of kin?"

"For a very good reason, Mr. Higginson: because they haven't got any to use," replied the hostess; "if they had, there wouldn't be any of that silly talk about men being bigger and stronger than their wives."

"As I pointed out to Mr. Duncan," said Timothy, "so large a fortune would be a terrible responsibility for a young girl like Miss Silverthorne."

"Not at all," retorted his wife; "that was a very foolish thing to say, Timothy! She would have no difficulty in finding a suitable husband to manage her fortune for her." Again visions of Theophilus dispensing Miss Fallowfield's fortune floated before his mother's eyes. And to do the good woman justice, it must be admitted that in her wildest dreams she did not desire that her son should use this money for himself or for his own personal pleasures. She conscientiously believed that Theophilus was the right man to carry out Miss Fallowfield's well-known intentions that the greater part of her fortune should be laid out upon charitable objects; and all she desired for her son was the glory and honour which would naturally accrue to one

who laid out so large a sum of money as efficiently as Theophilus would lay it out if only he had the chance.

"And doubtless, my love," added Timothy, chuckling at his own joke, "if, on the other hand, young Mr. Forrester inherited the money, he would likewise have no difficulty in finding a suitable wife to manage it properly for him."

But, as usual, Mr. Sprott's humour was lost upon his better half.

CHAPTER XII

THE DESIGNS OF THE CLAIMANTS

ALTHOUGH the interest felt in the disposition of Miss Fallowfield's fortune was deep and widespread, there was naturally no one so thoroughly absorbed in the question as the two young people themselves. To them it was a matter of vital importance affecting their whole future.

At first Claude's impulse had been to waive any claims he might have upon the property in favour of Dagmar, who apparently had so much more right to it from a moral point of view than he. But, as Mr. Duncan had explained to him, he could not waive his claim until it was proved that he had a claim to waive ; and while he was waiting to be enlightened upon this point, a change came o'er the spirit of his dream.

As long as it was a question between his own personal interest and Dagmar's, he never wavered, and never would waver, in his decision that she should have the whole of her aunt's fortune. It was only when he grasped the fact that, morally speaking, the money was bound to be spent in charity—that neither he nor Dagmar would individually be any the better off for it—that the first longings to become the possessor of the fortune began to stir in his heart. Mr. Duncan's assurance that Mrs. Forrester's intention to leave the money to some charitable object had legally no weight, was not worth the breath in which it was uttered as far as either of the two young people was concerned. To them the wish of the testatrix

was as binding as an Act of Parliament; and it would have been unthinkable to them to keep money for their own use which Miss Fallowfield had designed for charitable purposes.

But although nothing would have induced Claude to allow his own pleasure or profit to interfere with Dagmar's, to permit his cherished schemes to take precedence of hers was quite a different thing. Even the best of people will do things for the sake of their principles which they would scorn to do for the sake of their preferences; from which peculiarity of human nature arises the spirit of persecution—a not altogether ignoble spirit when rightly apprehended, but rather a virtue in excess than a vice in essence. The inquisitor is after all only the martyr turned inside out. The man who is ready to sacrifice other people's lives for a creed is generally equally ready to sacrifice his own; for to him it is the creed that matters and not the individual life. We canonize the martyr and anathematize the persecutor; but in reality it is only in circumstances that the twain differ and not in character. They are in fact identical persons, treated respectively from the subjective and objective points of view.

Now Claude Forrester was the sort of man who could have been either a martyr or an inquisitor, as circumstances demanded; that is to say, he was always ready to sacrifice a person—either himself or another—to a principle. And he was so certain—as what man similarly placed would not have been?—that his scheme of disposing of his step-mother's fortune for the good of mankind was infinitely superior to any charitable designs which Miss Silverthorne's brain was capable of conceiving, that he felt justified, the more he thought about it, in taking and disposing of the fortune should he have the chance. He had no desire for wealth for its own sake—no mere personal ambition; but he had a very strong desire to

serve his day and generation in the manner which he himself accounted best; and, if possible, to prevent other people from offering the same service after a different fashion.

It is very difficult even for the greatest minds to achieve depth unalloyed by narrowness; and Claude Forrester's intellect had by no means attained to this far-off end. It could hardly have been expected of him at four-and-twenty. He had made up his mind—no mean achievement at twenty-four—to do what he considered right at all costs; but he was by no means so sure that it was his duty to let other people do what they considered right at all costs, if he could possibly prevent it—given, of course, that their idea of rightdoing was opposed to his. He was true and sincere and high-minded and earnest, and was strongly imbued with the ideal side of life and character; but to pretend that he had not the defects of his qualities would be to prove that he was no fit denizen of this world of ours, where the good and the evil, the wheat and the tares, are inextricably intertwined.

A considerable portion of Claude's childhood had been spent with his father's parents in the Lake district; and the spirit of that wonderland had entered into his blood and impregnated his whole nature. The moodiness and the mysticism of the mountain were his—the instinct of prayer and of communion with the Divine.

For years Claude had nourished in his brain a scheme which there seemed no hope of accomplishing—he had secretly gone on raising an air-castle which there seemed no chance of ever transmuting into actual fact. Then suddenly the impossible appeared feasible, and the unattainable was brought into the region of practical politics.

His idea was to build a monastery after the fashion of the religious houses of the Middle Ages, where a certain number of clergy should live together and devote them-

selves to mission work; and in connection with this brotherhood there should be a college, where students, too impecunious to attend other places of learning, should be trained gratuitously for the taking of Holy Orders; so that no young man who felt a call to devote himself to the service of the Temple, and yet had not the means to educate himself in response to that call, should be debarred by his poverty from taking his appointed part in the ministry of the Most High.

Tenderly did Claude's imagination dwell upon the monastery of his dreams. His whole artistic nature rose up in a passion of desire to express itself in the form of an abbey uniting modern use with ancient beauty. He had visited most of the ruined abbeys in England, and had fused their various perfections in his own mind into a wonderful and harmonious whole, containing some part of each one of them. He had a great idea of the wonderful power that external beauty exerts upon the inner man; and he pictured a structure which should in itself be a liberal education to every student who was trained within its walls. By the seeing eye he would teach the understanding heart that the sacramental principle runs through everything; and that each outward and visible beauty in either art or nature is in reality but a symbol of some hidden and spiritual grace or truth.

And the beauty of the fabric should not only be an education to the younger men who came to graduate in the college; it should also be an inspiration to the elder members of the brotherhood, upholding and strengthening them for their ministry to the poor and needy who dwelt in the ugly and squalid places of the earth. When they were exhausted by their efforts to call souls out of the darkness of modern sin and civilization into the eternal light of the Presence of God, they would come back to bathe their weary spirits in the exquisite peace and beauty of their

monastic home, and there find rest and refreshment to enable them to take up their sacred work again with renewed hope and energy.

Of all the beautiful buildings which Claude had studied in the desire to reproduce their perfections according to the requirements of modern life, the one in which his soul most delighted was Fountains Abbey. Often and often had he dreamed of a modern Fountains, whose beauty should train and strengthen men for their struggle with the sin of the present day, and whose perfect grace and symmetry should uplift their spirits into the regions of that Heavenly City whose Builder and Maker is God.

There was one spot in Dinglewood Park which always seemed to Claude to embody the typical beauty of the scenery of the Midlands. Through a small valley, surrounded by richly-wooded slopes, a slowly-running stream made its way, breaking out now and again into miniature lakes reflecting the blue heavens, and into deep pools fringed with overhanging trees. It was a secret shrine of nature—one of those hidden places of the earth where the birds and the bees chant their Magnificat to the censing of the flowers, and the trees of the field stand by and clap their hands. But the hills which guarded this shrine were no impregnable mountains standing straight and high as the battlements of Heaven, but grassy uplands where the shadows of the beech trees traced strange patterns upon the sunlit sward; and the river which watered it was no wild and foaming torrent hurling itself into a passion of agony against the rocks which barred its path, but a wide and deep stream winding its way to the haunts of men in order to become at last one of the highways of commerce.

Oftentimes had Claude stood in that sheltered spot, and imagined a glorious tower rising up towards Heaven out of the fertile valley, guarding a cloistered hostelry for such pilgrims as had set their feet on the highway to Zion.

And now, as if by a miracle, the building of a modern abbey in that particular place became possible. And there would not only be money to raise the fabric; there would also be enough to endow the institution along the lines which Claude's imagination had depicted. The whispering trees and running waters seemed to mingle their voices in supplication for a temple to be erected in their midst, which—by its very presence—should perform anew the sacramental miracle, and should transmute their material beauty into a foretaste of the glory of a better country, that is to say a heavenly.

Surely all of us have had the feeling some time or another, when gazing at a beautiful view, that the natural beauty failed to satisfy us—that it left us with a feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest; and there is nothing which so completely finishes and seals the beauty of a landscape as the sight in its midst of a church spire or cathedral towers. Which is but a symbol of the truth that the central Fact of the whole universe is the Sacrifice of the great High Priest; and that all the beauties of nature and of art are but the steps and the curtains of that Divine Altar the smoke whereof ascendeth for ever and ever. The chambers of art and nature, of science and learning, are but smaller chapels in the great cathedral of life, leading us to the steps of that mysterious sanctuary, where—by His Sacrifice of Himself once offered—the Divine Victim reconciles all things unto God.

It appeared to Claude Forrester that he was specially called to put the finishing seal upon the landscape which he loved; and to give a point and a meaning to the beauty of that particular part of the Midlands, which until now it had lacked. He was indeed a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams; and it had been given to him to enter into the spirit of the old Roman road, and to hear the message which it brought out of the past. He knew—as your true

poet always will know, be he a poet in words or in stones, or colours or sweet sounds—that it is on mountain-tops and in desert places that the human most frequently holds converse with the Divine. But he also knew that in hidden woodland glades and mysterious thickets men have caught the vision of the Holy Grail; that those who go down to the sea in ships have seen One walking upon the waters hushing the tumult of the waves; yet that most of the wayfarers upon the highways of life are like to those travellers on the road to Emmaus who were so busy discussing the things that had happened that they knew not Who talked with them by the way.

The spirit of the road is the spirit of progress; yet it is generally progress towards earthly rather than heavenly goals; therefore the sojourners by the highways of life, more than the denizens of the forest or the dwellers by the sea, need something to remind them of that other and fairer world which is invisible to mortal eye. Both the sea and the forest lie nearer to the borderland of the better country than do the great thoroughfares of the workaday world. True, Saint Paul saw the heavenly Vision on the road to Damascus, and Saint Peter met the Ascended Master face to face upon the Appian Way; but the eyes of the ordinary traveller are so blinded by the dust of the road, and his ears so deafened by its traffic, that he neither sees the Ineffable Vision nor hears the music of the spheres. Therefore it is in low-lying midlands, rather than in mountain regions or by storm-haunted shores, that men need the message which is conveyed by means of temples made with hands; so that to them, too, as to the wayfarers on the road to Emmaus, the Master may be made known in Breaking of Bread.

To Claude's imagination the exquisite spot in Dinglewood Park looked empty and meaningless. It seemed

like the setting of a gem which was lost—the frame of a picture which was not yet painted; or, rather, perhaps like a bride who had adorned herself with her jewels in preparation for a bridegroom who tarried upon his way. Of what avail were her jewels, her walls of emerald and her pavements of sapphire, if he for whom she had decked herself did not come to rejoice over his bride? And Claude most ardently desired that to himself should be given the honour of placing the heavenly seal upon this scene of earthly beauty, and of raising in its midst a tabernacle where the Lord God might dwell among men in that peaceful valley of whispering woodlands and murmuring streams.

This was how the present state of affairs appeared to Claude; but to Dagmar it wore an entirely different aspect.

Brought up as she had been in an atmosphere of intellectual culture, the young architect's mysticism in no way appealed to her. It touched no answering chord in her heart—awakened no responsive mood in her spirit. In the first place she was eminently practical. But she was more than that; she was full of youthful hopes and ardours; but they were the hopes and ardours of the plain rather than of the mountain—of the hearth rather than of the cloister. She, too, saw her visions and dreamed her dreams; but they were neither dreams of medieval saints nor visions of angels. They were dreams of the ordinary conditions of modern life brought up to the highest possible pitch of morality and prosperity and comfort; they were visions of commonplace working men and women, trained and educated to produce the best that was in them.

Dagmar had developed wonderfully since her aunt's death; for there is nothing which so rapidly matures intelligent youth as a great sorrow. At the time when her parents died, she was too young to realize her loss, and

her aunt had never allowed her practically to feel it. Charlotte had been father and mother to the orphaned child. But now Dagmar was old enough to understand her bereavement, and to sorrow accordingly; though even yet it was the sorrow of springtime, when the clouds do not return after the rain. As long as she lived, Miss Fallowfield's strong personality had absorbed and overshadowed her niece; but when the elder lady was gone, the girl suddenly grew up and entered into her own intellectual kingdom.

It so often happens in the case of two people who are intimately connected with one another, that as long as they are together their diversities of character are marked; but as soon as they are separated the similarities between them come to the front. So it was with Charlotte and her niece. In the lifetime of Miss Fallowfield Dagmar seemed to be the child of her Irish father rather than of her English mother; but the girl's Hibernianism was purely superficial. At heart she was as typically Mercian, as her mother and her mother's sister had been.

And she was imbued with the spirit of the road as deeply as was Claude with the spirit of the mountain. While he longed to worship his Maker on solitary peaks and in secret places—to see the Divine Vision on the Mount of Transfiguration, and there to raise a tabernacle to commemorate what he had seen—she desired just as earnestly to minister to the Christ in the person of His little ones, and to fulfil by her duty to her neighbour her duty towards God. Perhaps the supernatural side of her mission was not so plain to her as it was to Claude; she was more apt than he to lose sight of the Creator in the creature, and to dwell upon the outward and visible signs of life's sacraments rather than upon their inward and spiritual graces; for, no more than he, could she escape from the defects of her qualities.

Her residence with her aunt had been the seed-time of Dagmar's existence; though it did not take much apparent effect at the time, Charlotte's broad views and vigorous intellectual life were now beginning to bear fruit. In short, Dagmar was learning to think for herself; but to do so according to those lines which Charlotte Fallowfield had laid down.

It was not likely that a young woman of such mental activity as Dagmar Silverthorne would be long in making up her mind as to how to dispose of the large fortune which seemed to be within her grasp. It was no hardship to her, any more than it was to Claude, to feel bound by an imperative obligation to spend the bulk of the money in charity. They would either of them probably have done so eventually, had Mrs. Forrester expressed no wish at all upon the matter: for they were both essentially altruistic and philanthropic, though their altruism and philanthropy took such different forms. But this oneness of desire to spend the fortune in charity, whichever of the two inherited it, was a bone of contention rather than a bond of harmony between them.

Saint Paul was far advanced on the pilgrim's road when he said, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity"; the majority of men—and women too—both saints and otherwise, would prefer to substitute for the word "sincerity" the phrase "in our own particular way." It is often easier to pardon the people who do wrong, than the people who do right but not as we ourselves do it; to forgive actual sinners, than rival and oppositious saints. At least so Claude and Dagmar found at this particular point in their respective careers.

Each could have pardoned the other for wishing to spend the fortune in selfish pleasures and luxuries, as the loser would thereby have clothed himself or herself in the robe of martyrdom, a most efficient waterproof against

the waves of adversity; but neither could quite forgive the other for possessing equally good intentions as he or she possessed, and yet proposing to carry them out in a totally diverse fashion.

Miss Silverthorne's idea with regard to her aunt's fortune was that it should be spent upon the building and endowing of an orphanage for girls. She, too, had had her castles in the air, though they were more practical and less poetical in their structure than Claude's; and they had always taken this particular form. The reason for their taking this form was twofold.

In the first place Dagmar was strongly imbued—as the best women always are—with the maternal instinct. Her heart leapt at the sight of a little child. She never saw childish suffering without yearning to alleviate it, or childish sorrow without longing to turn it into joy. Moreover, she loved to play with children—to hear their little voices whispering in her ears, and to feel their tiny hands clinging round her neck; and the thought of a large cheerful house tenanted by little ones who would otherwise be homeless, filled her with an ineffable delight.

It is just possible that there may be good and excellent women who have no natural love for children; but they are of the same genus as the roc and the sea-serpent, and it is extremely doubtful if their existence is anything but legendary. The women who dislike children may upon the surface appear agreeable and amiable creatures; but, as a rule, they are whited sepulchres, concealing some secret and hidden rottenness within. They may pride themselves upon neglecting the nursery for the sake of the social circle or the political platform; they may maintain that the office of a mother is inferior to that of an epoch-maker or a leader of society; nevertheless, nine times out of ten it would be better for these child-haters that a millstone should be hung round

their necks and they themselves cast into the sea, than that they should thus offend those little ones whose angels do always behold the face of the Father.

In the second place Dagmar was one of the modern school of young women who feels an immense interest in and sympathy for her own sex. It used to be the fashion for women to admire and idealize men, to regard the latter as infinitely superior beings to themselves, and to consider marriage in the light of a boon received rather than a gift bestowed. But we have changed all that. Although we still believe in the subjection of the wife and the obligation of the marriage-yoke, we have ceased to subscribe to the cult of the thrown handkerchief. We will still obey our husbands when once we have married them ; but nothing will induce us to admit that it was they and not we who originally conferred the favour.

The humility of the female passed away with the Victorian era ; a modern woman could no more write Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* than she could emulate Ellen in *The Wide, Wide World*. But the sisterhood of women has a far stronger claim upon her than it had upon her grandmothers ; and she would do far more for her fellow-women than her great-aunts would ever have done. The proverbial spite of women against each other is a played-out bogey, as dead as many another doornail of the past. Nowadays women admire one another's beauty and talents quite as much as men admire them, and are quite as ready to do justice to and appreciate the same. Moreover, there has sprung up a spirit of camaraderie and loyalty among womankind which was almost unknown in past generations. Except in particular and exceptional instances, women have ceased to be rivals and have become friends.

In this respect Dagmar Silverthorne was verily and indeed of her day and generation ; the cause of woman-

kind lay very near her heart. This spirit had been nurtured and fostered in her schooldays; and since Mrs. Forrester's marriage, Miss Perkins—who was an able woman in advance of her times—had continued the process during her sojourn at Dinglewood as Dagmar's chaperone and companion. Charlotte Fallowfield had shared the mid-Victorian adoration of the male in general, and the lack of any deep sympathy with her own sex. She was one of the women (and they are fast going out of fashion) who openly prides herself upon preferring the other sex to her own. Of course, women of this persuasion still abound, and will continue to do so as long as the world stands, but they no longer openly declare their preference; they rather veil it under an assumed affection for their female acquaintances.

But poor Charlotte instinctively regarded every other woman as her rival, and looked upon her with suspicion and jealousy. Hence her life was rendered more lonely than it would otherwise have been, as this attitude of mind cut her off from the great and enduring delight of friendship with members of her own sex. And perhaps it not only shut her out from the pleasures of friendship; it may have closed to her the gates of love as well; for the women who cherish such a profound admiration for men are apt to expect their idols to be as perfect as they imagine them, and are woefully disappointed when these latter do not turn out to be the heroes which they never for a moment pretended to be. The woman who adores man in the abstract is apt to bore man in the concrete; for men, as a rule, do not want their virtues idealized, but their weaknesses condoned; therefore, she is generally fated either not to marry at all, because she can find no one who adequately fulfils her impossible and somewhat schoolgirlish ideal of manhood; or else to marry unhappily for

herself (and still more unhappily for her husband), because she will spend the rest of her life in punishing him for not being the heroic creature which he never pretended or hoped or even desired to be.

But on this point, at any rate, Dagmar differed fundamentally from her aunt. She did not dislike men—she even intended eventually to marry one,—but she regarded them as in no way superior to women except in their better fortune. It was for them that the world had been made ; taken as a whole women were profoundly to be pitied ; and Dagmar was as yet young enough to consider herself equal to the task of regulating and repairing the scales of Justice when these important instruments were out of order.

She intended—should Fortune favour her—to build an orphanage for girls of the middle and professional classes, and for girls only, so that at any rate in one instance the luck should be on the female side. This orphanage should be large and bright and airy, fitted with every modern comfort ; and there should be a beautiful garden all round it, where the children might play to their hearts' content. There they should spend their childhood and their girlhood, and there be trained and educated to take their respective parts in the world. And she herself would rule over them, like a girlish Mother Superior, and have them taught to become the sort of woman she herself approved of.

Such was Dagmar's dream of what would happen should the Courts decide that her aunt's fortune was now hers.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DECISION OF THE COURT

It was on a bright morning in early autumn that Dagmar came out of Dinglewood Park gates on to the old high-road. There had been a slight frost in the night, and the cobwebs accordingly were draping the hedges in that veil of thick white lace which the latter never wear except on an autumn morning. The village looked very picturesque in the soft clear sunshine, with its tall Church spire tapering up into the pale blue sky : and the distant view had all the charm of mystery, enveloped in the white mist which the sun had not yet dispelled. And as Dagmar came out of the great iron gates and stood in the broad highway, she heard the call of the road sounding in her ears—that call to strange quests and wonderful adventures which youth and health always hear when they stand in the centre of a great high-road, and see its tempting path going forth, on the right hand and on the left, into the distant stretches of the unknown. The spirit of the road —the instinct which is for ever saying to the people "Go forward"—was strong upon Dagmar at that moment ; and she felt a longing to go forth to meet her fate.

As she came out of the gates, Claude happened to emerge at the same moment from the Vicarage—a coincidence which would have been more remarkable had not the Vicarage windows commanded the drive leading from the Hall to the road.

"Where are you off to ?" he asked, coming across and joining Dagmar.

" Dagmar came out of the great iron gates and stood in the broad highway " (*see page 184*).

"For a good long walk; I feel just in the mood for it. I want to walk off all those tiresome cobwebs that Mr. Duncan has been spinning in my brain for the last few months. I'm getting thoroughly sick of that silly old fortune; and I should wish it was behind the fire if it wasn't for the orphanage."

"For the monastery you mean." The rival claims of the two opposing charities formed a never-ending subject of argument between the two young people.

"No; I don't; I mean the orphanage."

"I say, may I come with you? I feel rather in the mood for a good walk myself," asked Claude. Dagmar might hold sadly distorted views as to the wisest manner of laying out a fortune; but she had the prettiest of ways and faces, and a tale of but twenty-one years.

She acceded gracefully. Youth clings to youth, even though there may be differences of opinion in the air. "Of course you may, if you'll be nice and sensible."

"I'm afraid I am never very nice; but I always try to be sensible," replied the young man humbly.

"Well, that's funny; because you nearly always succeed in being nice, and hardly ever in being sensible."

Claude felt that he ought to be annoyed by this remark; but, strange to say, he felt distinctly elated. "After all, it is far better to be nice than to be sensible; of which truth you yourself are a bright and shining instance," he said.

Dagmar suddenly stood still. "What do you mean by that? I am always both," she exclaimed.

But Claude's passion for truth could not let this statement passed unchallenged. "Oh! no, Dagmar. Always nice and charming and delightful and bewitching, I admit; but not quite always sensible."

"Invariably," retorted Dagmar, continuing her progress with her chin in the air.

Claude was nothing if not infallible. "No, no, Dagmar. Not about the orphanage, for instance."

"Yes, yes, Claude. It is in the matter of the orphanage that my sense—always at concert pitch—reaches boiling-point, and blossoms like the American aloe." Dagmar excelled in mixing her metaphors.

"But, my dear Dagmar, you must see for yourself that it is far more important to train men for the ministry than women for the hearth."

"Oh! please don't alliterate, and say 'men for the ministry'; it reminds me so of poor Octavius Rainbrow. I make a rule of never using two words that begin with the same letter, for fear I should grow like him. I daresay it is very horrid of me and in shocking taste to remember that Octavius alliterated now that he is dead; I ought only to recall his good points, and the words he used that began with different letters. But I can't see that people's being dead makes them any different when they were alive; and it is all humbug pretending that it does!"

"I don't agree with you." (He never did agree with her.) "To me it seems that death sets a sort of halo round the departed; makes them somehow sacred and sanctified, don't you know?"

But though reverence might be one of Claude's most marked virtues, his present audience was totally incapable of appreciating that side of his character. "No, I don't know anything of the kind. At least it doesn't make them sacred and sanctified to me, unless they were sacred and sanctified to begin with. And it's simply absurd to say that training men for the pulpit is more important than training women for the hearth, as you call it; simply absurd! Because, after all, it is what men have learnt on the hearthrug that they teach from the pulpit; it is the hand that rocks the cradle that really writes the

sermons—far more than your old brotherhoods and monasteries and things of that kind."

Claude sighed. It was so difficult to get Dagmar to see things from the right point of view; almost as difficult as to get her to confine her remarks to any subject which happened to be under discussion. She was always flying off at a tangent on some side issue which had nothing whatever to do with the matter in hand; and Claude's mind—which travelled slowly but surely—often found it impossible to follow her.

"How quickly you change the subject," he said; "you often quite confuse me. You were talking about the monastery, and then you suddenly flew off to Octavius Rainbrow and respect for the dead; and then, before I'd time to come up to you, you were back at the monastery again."

"But your mind is a most awfully slow one, Claude; I should change it, if I were you. People are often all the better for changing their minds. You might advertize in the *Exchange and Mart*: 'Wanted to exchange a one-tortoise-power mind for a twenty-five-hare-power one.' You'd find it a vast improvement. And as to the monastery, I wish you'd give up the idea altogether. Monasteries are most awfully silly things really. I know they are."

"Oh! Dagmar, how can you say that? Why, it was the life of the monasteries that was the inspiring and vital force of England in the Middle Ages; the cohesive power that held everything together."

Dagmar tossed her head disdainfully. "I daresay they were useful enough then, before anything more sensible had been invented. But now we've got railways and telegraphs and telephones and newspapers to hold us together, so we needn't trouble the monasteries any further. Stage-coaches were very useful in their day—and so were

rushlights and coats of armour; but you'd consider me rather an idiot if I suggested to spend Aunt Charlotte's fortune in supplying the British Army with first-class fourteenth-century coats of mail."

"But I'm not suggesting to build a fourteenth-century monastery, Dagmar; I'm suggesting to build a twentieth-century one, to deal with twentieth-century difficulties and to meet twentieth-century needs."

"Well, I call it a ridiculous idea altogether; most impracticable! Can't you see that the great thing is to get hold of the children; and that if the children are properly trained, the men and women are bound to be all right because they grow into them?"

"I don't care for children," replied Claude coldly.

"Not care for children? Then you can't really be a nice man; there must be something radically wrong in you which will rise to the surface some day and totally undermine the rest of your character."

"I mean I'm not fond of them as you are; not interested in them as I am in men. And, besides, you don't propose to train children into good men—only into good women, as far as I understand."

"I'll tell you what," said Dagmar, with an air of one who was meeting her adversary half-way; "if I get the money I'll build an orphanage for girls, and if you get it you can build an orphanage for boys. I should quite approve of that. It would be far more sensible than that ridiculous monastery notion."

Claude sighed again. It was hopeless to try to explain to her all that the idea of the monastery meant to him; as a rule women had such strange ways of looking at things, and such tiresome limitations. If only his mother had lived, he thought, she would have understood all his mystical dreams and longings; but she was an exceptional woman, while Dagmar was quite ordinary and typical.

"If only you'd do that," continued Dagmar, still graciously making concessions, "I shouldn't at all mind if the fortune went to you. In fact I should be quite pleased, and not a bit nasty or jealous about it. I'd just as soon you had it as not, if you'll do with it what I want."

"Naturally," replied Claude, repressing a smile. He was too young to have a very fully developed or subtle sense of humour, but he could not fail now and again to recognize the charming inconsistencies of the gentler sex as exemplified by Miss Silverthorne.

"Well then," urged Dagmar in a caressing tone, edging a little nearer to him as they walked, "won't you promise to do what I want, even if the money does come to you?"

"But an orphanage for boys wouldn't be what you want. You want an orphanage for girls, I believe." How inconsistent women were!

"Oh! I'll give up the girls and let you have the boys, if the fortune comes to you, as you like boys so much better than girls; and after all, they are both children, and it is children that I love and long to help. And, you see, you can bring up the boys in such a way that they'll all grow up simply yearning to become clergymen; and that'll turn out a million times better for the Church as a whole than your old monastery plan."

For a moment Claude was almost tempted to yield, Dagmar's eyes were so very blue and so very sweet as they looked into his. Then he hardened his heart. "No, Dagmar, you mustn't tempt me to give up the dream of my life, and to neglect that service to the Church which I believe I have been specially called to perform. If I gave it up to please you, I should feel myself no better than Herod the Tetrarch when he cut off the Baptist's head in order to please a woman."

"But she wasn't a very nice woman, and it isn't very polite of you to compare me to her," retorted the young lady with some justice.

"I wasn't comparing you to her; Heaven forbid! I was only comparing myself to him."

But Dagmar was off at her usual tangent. "That reminds me of a picture in a Sunday-book I had when I was a child, the description of which I always read to myself as 'Salome dancing before the Tea-tray.' And it seemed to me a most suitable name for the picture, as the girl was pirouetting before a lot of people sitting at a meal, presumably tea. I remember how Aunt Charlotte laughed when I first read it to her; and it was years before I found out what she had laughed at."

"It certainly was rather funny," Claude admitted.

"It was a most apt and sensible rendering of the passage," replied the translater proudly; "another instance of that sound sense I mentioned a few minutes ago, which has dogged my footsteps across the sea of life ever since I first left the parental nest and began to flutter my own wings; and which has now culminated in the idea of the orphanage."

Claude's face fell. He did so wish she would keep clear of that dreadful orphanage for a bit; no sooner did they begin to get on nicely together, than either the monastery or the orphanage cropped up and spoiled everything.

"You always look glum when I mention the orphanage," Dagmar continued: "which shows you must have a horrid disposition."

Claude defended himself. "Not at all. You do more than look glum when I mention the monastery; you indulge in open abuse."

"Oh! that's quite different, because there's nothing deserving abuse in an orphanage, and there's everything

deserving abuse in a monastery. And besides, it's much better to abuse than to look glum. I'd a million times rather have a hasty temper than a sulky one."

"And anyway, even if I do not altogether approve of your idea, I never call it silly, as you do mine," Claude still pleaded.

"For the very good reason that it isn't silly, and yours is."

Claude looked hurt. "I can understand your not altogether falling in love with my scheme, but I don't see how you can call it exactly silly."

"Because it is; most awfully, dreadfully, frightfully silly! That's exactly what I should call it."

"And do; but I still think you are wrong in so doing."

"I call nunneries fearfully silly, too," Dagmar persisted. "It seems to me absurd to shut a lot of women up in a house together, with no chance of getting married, and the most hideous clothes you can conceive of. So awfully dull for the poor things! Of course I think that women are intended for something even better than domestic life—they should take their proper place in the world alongside of men; but even the hearthrug, as you call it, is better than the nunnery. And then there are no children in a nunnery either; and there is nothing in the whole world so heavenly as children. Even the Bible—which is always right about everything—says how happy people are who have their quiver full of olive branches; and that just shows what a lot the Bible thinks about children!"

"There are convent-schools. Many nuns devote themselves entirely to the education of the young."

"Then those aren't as silly as the others: I'll admit that. But you don't propose to have any children taught in your monastery; only horrid young men."

"I've told you, Dagmar, that I am not particularly interested in children. They don't appeal to me."

"Then that shows, as I've said before, that there must

be something very wrong about you. You are like a whited sepulchre that looks ripe outside but is really rotten at the core." And Dagmar shook her head in marked disapprobation. "I simply adore children, as you know; and I shall have my orphanage full of the dear little things. And I shall not confine it to orphans who have no parents; I shall let in orphans whose parents are too poor to educate them properly, and I shall encourage well-born and impecunious parents to send their children to me; and well-born and impecunious parents who haven't any children shall send me their little nephews and nieces. I want to help children, and especially girls; and most especially girls of the better classes—professional men's daughters and people like that—because I think life is so dreadfully hard for refined and well-bred girls who haven't got any money."

"You are right there," said Claude; "there are no people to whom life is harder."

"So Aunt Charlotte always said. And just think how you'll be robbing those poor little girls if you go and build your tiresome old monastery! The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children ought to tackle you, before you take the bread out of those poor children's mouths and build monasteries with it."

"You are certainly right in saying that life is cruelly hard for impecunious women of the better classes—especi ally if, as is usually the case, they have never been trained to earn their own living," said Claude, as usual abreast of the last remark but one.

"And if they don't marry," added Dagmar, "which they usually don't nowadays. I wonder how it is that so many more men marry than women."

"But they can't. Every man who marries must marry a woman; so the same number of men and women must get married."

"Then how is it that there are so many more single women left on hand than single men?" demanded Dagmar triumphantly. "It proves that more men marry than women if there are fewer left single."

"Not a bit of it. It proves that there are more women than men to begin with; so that when an equal number of both are married, more women than men must necessarily be left."

"Well, that comes to the same thing. How you do quibble about trifles!"

Just then the hoot of a motor-car was heard behind them, and the two young people stepped off the road on to one of its broad grassy margins so as to leave the vehicle—which was dashing along at most illegal speed—room for its unhallowed progress. At that very moment a tiny child came out of one of the cottages they were passing, and began to toddle across the road right in front of the flying monster. Swift as thought Claude dashed after the baby, and snatched it to one side as the car was close upon them. For an instant Dagmar shut her eyes, unable to repress a shriek, as she fully expected to see both Claude and the child lying dead upon the road in the wake of this Juggernaut's car; but when she opened them again, Claude was standing safe and sound by the side of the road, the little boy crowing in his arms; and the vehicle—which had so nearly caused their destruction—was diminishing to a speck in the distance.

Mingled emotions surged up in the girl's heart. Admiration for the physical courage which had proved equal to such a test, and something warmer than admiration as she saw Claude tenderly hold the child for a second, and then give him back to the mother, who had rushed out of the cottage in a perfect frenzy of gratitude.

"That was simply splendid of you!" she said, her sapphire eyes wet with tears, as he came across the road

and joined her again, with all the awkwardness of a young Englishman who has just performed a heroic action and is ashamed of his own heroism.

"Oh! it was nothing," he replied carelessly; "any other fellow would have done the same."

Then compunction added itself to Dagmar's other feelings. "I'm sorry I called you a whited sepulchre," she said; "it was horrid of me."

Claude laughed. "Oh! no, it wasn't. I daresay you were quite right, and that I am a bit of a humbug."

"But you're the right sort of a humbug, Claude; you are ever so much better than you make yourself out to be, and are really much whiter than you are painted. And you said you didn't care for children!"

"Well, no more I do; I'm not a good hand at dangling them round and talking a lot of rot to them, don't you know? That sort of thing bores me. But I wasn't going to let a poor little beggar like that be cut to mincemeat if I could prevent it; that was quite a different thing."

Dagmar was silent. To tell the truth she was feeling rather small. Also she was learning the lesson that a man must be judged by his deeds rather than by his words; a lesson which no woman completely masters while she is very young, and which the majority of women never master at all.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Claude, "here's old Duncan coming riding along the road. I wonder what he means by playing about like this in office hours."

"I know," Dagmar replied with swift feminine intuition. "He is coming to tell us the decision of the Court about Aunt Charlotte's money."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know what makes me think it; but I'm sure of it, all the same."

The two young hearts beat fast as the elder man

approached them and drew rein. Neither could hide their excitement at the thought of the momentous decision that was about to be announced to them. They had felt that they were going to meet their fate as they started out on the high-road that morning; and they had met it.

"I was just coming to see you young people," Mr. Duncan began, "on a matter of important business."

Dagmar interrupted him. "I know, I know; you have come to tell us the decision of the Court. What is it? Please tell us at once and put us out of our misery."

The lawyer hesitated.

"Hurry up," urged Dagmar; "we both want dreadfully to know."

"Well, then, my dear young lady, it is my duty to inform you that the Court has decided that in all human probability a husband would survive his wife on the occasion of a shipwreck, being the stronger and more vigorous person of the two; and especially in a case where he could swim and she could not. Therefore the fortune descends to Forrester, as being his father's sole heir."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MONASTERY

As the following winter was a mild one, with hardly any frost and snow, Claude was able to begin work upon his monastery at once ; and by the time the spring came, not only were the foundations laid, but the walls were beginning to rise from the ground. No time was wasted in the designing of plans, as the young architect had devoted himself to collecting and embodying the dreams and sketches of former years and combining them into designs for a small but lovely abbey, as soon as the bare possibility of his inheriting his step-mother's fortune was made known to him ; so that by the time the Court announced its decision, he was able to put the matter at once into the hands of a first-class builder.

Of course, now that it had entered into the region of practical politics, the monastery lost much of its mystical and imaginary perfection ; Claude found it impossible to reproduce in actual fact the exquisite fabric of his dreams ; but he succeeded in making plans for a religious house of small dimensions but considerable beauty, which bid fair to resemble, if not to rival, the sacred edifices of an earlier and more artistic age. Our realizations always fall short of our ideals ; it is in the nature of things that they must do so ; but if our ideals were not infinitely more beautiful than our realizations, our realizations would not be beautiful at all.

But though the reality fell short of its architect's imaginings, it nevertheless promised to be a most beautiful

structure. If the ages of the strongest faith have been the ages of the highest architecture, then surely the living faith of an individual architect must have its effect upon the work of his hands and of his brain; and the religious life of Claude Forrester was so real and so intense that it could not fail to express itself in his art. A great author once described architecture as "frozen music"; and Claude's heart was so filled with the music of the spheres, and his existence so attuned to the eternal harmony, that his psalm of life took material shape and was frozen into the form of a small but exquisite temple, glorious both within and without.

Like all true artists he was utterly absorbed in his work. He forgot to sorrow for his father—he forgot to fall in love with Dagmar Silverthorne; for the time the miracle of creation obsessed him, and he had no room in his life or in his thoughts for anything else. The joy of the creator—like all other perfect joys—cannot be imagined by any but those who have experienced it; and to them it is an ecstasy not to be expressed in words. But every real artist—be he musician or painter, writer or builder—has tasted the nectar of the gods, and has slaked his thirst for once at the spring of perennial joy. For there is no greater or more godlike happiness than for a man to look at the thing which he has himself created—which he has formed out of chaos into an embodiment of truth and beauty—and to see that it is very good.

For the time being Claude Forrester was absolutely happy. But Dagmar Silverthorne was precisely the reverse.

The decision of the Court had been far less of a shock and a disappointment to her than it would have been to an older (and a so-called wiser) woman; for with the divine unworldliness of youth, she had no idea (or, she had perhaps the true idea) of the value of money. The loss of

nearly a million sterling left her unmoved. True, she mourned the destruction of her orphanage in the air, as we all mourn the demolition of our cloud-capped palaces ; but the idea of it had never taken hold upon her as the idea of the monastery had taken hold upon Claude ; she did not possess the artistic nature and temperament.

But though she was as yet child enough not to sorrow over the loss of a fortune, she was quite woman enough to sorrow over the loss of a lover ; and it cut her to the heart to perceive how Claude was now so absorbed in the building of his monastery that he had no room in his life for her ; she was completely crowded out.

During the months immediately following the wreck of the *Euroclydon*, the two young people had seen a great deal of each other, and had been drawn very close together by a common sorrow ; with the consequence that Dagmar had quite fallen in love with Claude, and Claude had very nearly fallen in love with Dagmar. Had he been less of an artist he would have fallen in love with her entirely ; but, as it was, his art became her most formidable rival. She had ranged herself against the monastery ; and Claude had gradually grown to regard her and it as antagonistic and opposing claims. She had sufficient beauty and wit to hold her own against any other woman ; but she was powerless against that dream of embodied truth and enshrined loveliness which Claude had long cherished in his heart, and which he was now endeavouring to express in the form of an exquisite House of God set in the midst of one of Mercia's fairest spots. His was a nature with whom the ideal would ever be more present than the real.

As the mother whom he hardly remembered had been so endowed by his imagination with every grace and virtue that she had become the ruling influence of his life, so the temple which as yet existed only in his dreams was the

centre and mainspring of his existence. Reality so often fell short of his expectations that he shrank from it as from something which bruised and hurt; but the things which existed only in his own dream-world were so glorified by the light of his beautiful if austere nature, that they completely satisfied his longing for material and spiritual perfection. He was utterly unconscious of the fact that what he was really admiring and worshipping was but the image of his own pure and exalted character gilded by the glamour of his brilliant imagination. He saw his own perfections reflected in other people, and loved and revered those other people accordingly. Because he himself was chivalrous and high-minded and reverent, he took it for granted that they were chivalrous and high-minded and reverent also; but he was so simple-minded and single-hearted that it never dawned upon him that he was like a bird breaking its wings in order to reach its reflection in a mirror. Of those others, whom he thus unconsciously endowed with his own attributes, he thought all the world; but of himself he thought nothing at all.

Yet, on the other hand, if he had seen other people as they really were—if all their faults and follies and failings had been suddenly revealed to him—he would have had no pity for them. He simply would not have understood; and would have pardoned nothing because he would have comprehended nothing. His duty towards God he was ever ready to offer with every accessory of exquisite fabric and stately ceremonial; but of his duty towards his neighbour he had not as yet learnt even the rudiments. He was willing to give his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned for the truth's sake, if needs be; but of the charity which suffereth long and is kind, he knew nothing whatsoever.

Such men are the raw material whereof great saints and great artists are manufactured. But woe betide the

woman who is so misguided as to fall in love with one of them! Instead of wandering in a garden of spices, she will have to stand in the outer courts of a temple; instead of sitting by a hearthstone, she will be called upon to kneel before an altar whereon fire from Heaven shall descend to consume the burnt sacrifice.

Dagmar was still living at Dinglewood Hall with her old schoolmistress, Miss Perkins. With the rest of the estate the Dinglewood property had gone to Claude; but in his present bachelor condition he did not want to burden himself with a large establishment such as the Hall would require; so with an absence of pride which would have been impossible in a man, Dagmar decided to rent it from him, leaving the park and the gardens in his hands. This she could well afford to do on the income which her aunt had left her; for though too large for Claude's present needs and desires, the house was by no means an enormous one. With the common sense characteristic of a woman, as opposed to the proper pride distinctive of a man, Dagmar realized that half a loaf is a more satisfying diet than a total absence of bread; and that even if the man she loved had not sufficient good taste and right feeling to fall in love with her, she would rather meet him constantly as a friend than be cut off from his society altogether. This half-loaf policy rarely recommends itself to the masculine mind; as a rule, if a man loves a woman and cannot marry her, his next alternative is to try to forget her as speedily as possible. But a woman would rather be the friend of the man she loves than nothing at all; if she cannot marry him, she still enjoys meeting him out at tea occasionally, and passing with him—as country people put it—the time of day. Which shows that sometimes—though all tradition denies it—she has a stronger sense of proportion than he.

Public opinion in Dinglewood was dead against the

decision of the Court. To her humbler neighbours it seemed a gross injustice that Dagmar should not have inherited her aunt's fortune ; that this same fortune should have gone instead to her aunt's step-son seemed even a more flagrant scandal ; but that this step-son should propose to spend it upon the building of a monastery was the most burning outrage of all !

So strong was the current of ultra-Protestant disapproval of this monastery, that it even bore along those two historic enemies, Mrs. Sprott and Mrs. Peppercorn, side by side on its impetuous stream. For the time being they were one in opposition to a common foe.

"Well, of all the things I ever heard in my life," exclaimed Mrs. Peppercorn, "the idea of spending poor Miss Fallowfield's fortune on a monastery beats everything. It's the very uptake of all !"

The two ladies had met accidentally in the village post-office ; and—having concluded their respective business transactions—had plunged straightway into the subject which was occupying all the minds of Dinglewood.

"It is indeed terrible," replied Mrs. Sprott ; "how terrible perhaps neither of us can as yet realize. When I see our dear Church of England beginning to be honeycombed with monasteries and nunneries and such-like abominations, I feel it is time to fling down the gauntlet and make a stand." The good lady therefore squared her already too square shoulders and made herself ready for battle. This warlike attitude was, however, less impressive in the case of Mrs. Sprott than it would have been in that of a more peaceable spirit, as her gauntlet was so frequently being flung down that the ground, so to speak, had become her glove-box ; it was there that her gauntlet was usually kept.

"And it just shows what Miss Fallowfield herself thought of monasteries, her marrying a clergyman," added

Mrs. Peppercorn. "If she'd been in favour of shutting up the clergy and making bachelors of them, as the Roman Catholics do, would she have gone and married one herself when she was nearly fifty years of age, I should like to know?"

"Certainly not, Mrs. Peppercorn; as you point out, she was old enough to know her own mind."

"Old enough to know it and to have forgotten it again!"

"It is a terrible thing," remarked Mrs. Sprott, "to see power placed in hands that are too young and too inexperienced to exercise it properly."

Here the post-mistress put in a word. "It is a terrible thing to see power placed in any one pair of hands, to my thinking."

"That depends upon who is at the other end of the arms," retorted Mrs. Peppercorn. "But for my part I don't hold with the young having too much money to dispose of till they've lived long enough to learn not to make fools of themselves; and that's a lesson which Methuselah himself wouldn't have mastered, if he'd been like some folks as I could mention."

"In such cases the only thing to be done is for the young to take counsel with older and wiser heads as to the spending of their superfluity," said Mrs. Sprott. "If only that misguided young man had consulted me, I could have directed the course of his beneficence into far more deserving and more desirable channels. In fact there was one particular charity in which I specially wished to enlist his sympathy and interest, if only he would have given me the chance."

"Then why didn't you ask him to drop in to dinner on a Sunday when you'd something specially tasty," asked Mrs. Peppercorn; "and mention the matter to him then? Nine times out of ten the shortest way to a man's pocket

is through his stomach." And the worthy woman enunciated this strange physiological dogma with the convincing air of one who knew.

"A monastery seems a shocking sort of thing to me," remarked Miss Skinner; "so wicked and mysterious and Roman—almost like the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's" (she pronounced the last word to rhyme with *Maud*).

Mrs. Sprott fully agreed with her. "It does indeed, Miss Skinner. I feel sure that a really nice-minded young man would never have thought of such a thing!"

But Mrs. Peppercorn shook her head. "Don't be too sure of that, Mrs. Sprott. If you knew all the things that nice-minded young men think of, I fancy you'd be a bit surprised at times."

"No," continued Mrs. Sprott, ignoring this last remark, "no really God-fearing young man would have ever suggested building anything so Roman and idolatrous as a monastery. If he wanted anything in that line, surely the Y.M.C.A. supplies all that he could desire. Had my Theophilus been in Claude Forrester's place, such an idea as a monastery would never have entered his head. My son may have his faults, I admit."

"He has," agreed Mrs. Peppercorn with alacrity; "nobody ever denied that."

"But he would never waste money on anything so useless—and I think I may add so un-Christian—as a monastery," continued Mrs. Sprott, again ignoring the interruption. "The Y.M.C.A. is good enough for him, I am thankful to say, and he has been a member of it for over ten years. Mark my words, there is something radically bad in that young Forrester, or else he would never even have allowed his thoughts to run on such a thing as a monastery. But what can you expect from the son of a man who actually took the bread out of my

Theophilus's mouth ?" Mr. Forrester's acceptance of the living of Dinglewood had gradually assumed this form in Mrs. Sprott's mind's eye.

"You can't take something out that was never put in," retorted Mrs. Peppercorn; "as far as I know, Mr. Theophilus's mouth was quite empty with regard to the living of Dinglewood."

"But it ought not to have been," sternly replied the offended mother; "that is just what I complain of. And I can only mourn over the sad spectacle of a large fortune placed in the hands of such a sinful and ignorant and misguided young man as Claude Forrester."

"It almost makes one begin to doubt the wisdom of Providence," said the sceptical post-mistress.

But Mrs. Sprott could not speak evil of the Power Who, according to her ideas, was just one step higher than the Archbishop of Canterbury. "No, Miss Skinner, nothing should tempt us to do that. Think of our dear Church of England, and all that we owe to her; and remember that it was by the wisdom of Providence that she sprang into life at the time of the Reformation."

"And by whose wisdom was it that the Roman Catholics sprang into life a good bit before then, and the Dissenters sprang into life a good bit afterwards ?" demanded Mrs. Peppercorn.

"I would rather not say," replied Mrs. Sprott, pursing up her mouth as though it were with difficulty that she withheld the name. "But don't tell me that you have any sympathy with Roman Catholics on the one hand or with Dissenters on the other, Mrs. Peppercorn."

"I haven't any at all; but I'm not sure that Providence hasn't. And it was the wisdom of Providence that you were talking about, Mrs. Sprott; not mine. And if you'll pardon me saying so, it is a great mistake to take it for granted that because you disapprove of a thing, the

Almighty is bound to disapprove of it, too ; because that don't follow at all. If you tell me that you can settle your husband's opinions, I believe you ; but if you tell me that you can settle your Maker's opinions, I don't. And I fancy He often praises the folks as we blame, and t'other way about ; which ain't particularly flattering to us, if we only knew it."

"Well, if you think that He approves of Claude Forrester and the monastery, I can only say I feel convinced that you are mistaken," replied Mrs. Sprott, picking up her umbrella from the counter where it had reposed during the above conversation, and preparing to leave the shop ; "and I shall go through the entire village from house to house telling the inmates my opinion of that sinful and ignorant young man, and warning them against him and his Popish ways ; and I shall feel that I am thereby doing God service."

"Well, I very much doubt if He'll think the same, or thank you for your interference," Mrs. Peppercorn cried after the retreating figure ; "it doesn't seem to me much the sort of job that Christian workers are expected to perform. But you, being a parson's mother, ought to know better than I do ; and I'm sure I hope you'll be rewarded according to your work—which is the most any of us can expect. But I wouldn't be mixed up in such doings for anything. I do my best by the Almighty, and He does His best by me in consequence ; which is more than I could well expect if I went about speaking evil of my neighbours."

CHAPTER XV

THE EXERCISE OF PATRONAGE

THE conversation related in the foregoing chapter occurred shortly after the decision of the Court was made known, and when it had only lately become public property that the bulk of the late Miss Fallowfield's fortune had gone to Claude Forrester, and that he intended to lay out the same upon the erection and endowment of an Anglican monastery ; and as the weeks ran on, and the foundations of this building were actually laid, the bitter feeling in the village increased rather than diminished.

Mrs. Sprott was specially vituperative. As she had promised, she made it her duty to carry on a house-to-house visitation in Dinglewood parish in order to set every inhabitant against Claude Forrester and his house of prayer. And she verily and indeed believed that she was thereby showing her loyalty to that religion the hall-mark of which is the love that its disciples bear towards one another ; a form of belief which is by no means uncommon. To a great extent she succeeded in her unholy mission, since evil is a weed which flourishes apace, while good is a plant of but tardy growth ; so that before long the innocent and high-minded young architect became an object of horror and hatred in his late father's parish. Possibly also the demon of envy was standing at the elbow of every parishioner, ready to second Mrs. Sprott's efforts ; for it is never very hard to believe ill of those who are considerably more fortunate than ourselves.

Had Claude not been suddenly uplifted to the dizzy heights of great wealth, his religious tenets would have been regarded as misfortunes rather than as faults, and he would have been pitied as insane rather than condemned as criminal.

For his part he took little or no notice of the enmity against him. For one thing he was to a great extent unconscious of it; for a man who is deprived of the privilege of intimate female companionship is also generally deprived of the advantage of hearing the disagreeable things that other people are saying about him. But if he had heard, it would not have depressed him overmuch; for as yet he was too self-centred and too deeply absorbed in his own work to pay much heed to the thoughts and words of other people. He strove to create things of beauty for the sake of the things themselves and not of the persons who would look at them; he sought the self-approval of the satisfied artist rather than the praise of his fellow-men.

But the plans of his *magnum opus* were barely completed and its foundations scarcely laid, when he was awakened from his dream of architectural bliss by the calls of a duty which clamoured to be fulfilled. And as this call was echoed by the voice of episcopacy, Claude had no alternative but to listen and obey. Early in the winter the Bishop of Merchester called upon Claude, and explained that the incumbency of Dinglewood had now been vacant ever since the death of the late Vicar: but that it had not been filled up again, as the presentation to the living was vested in the owner of the Dinglewood estate; and it had only lately been decided who that owner was. Now, however, that the decision was made, and Claude had entered into his inheritance, the Bishop pointed out to him that it was high time for the young man to take up one of the most important

duties of his position, and to appoint a spiritual pastor for the parish of Dinglewood in his late father's place.

It was characteristic of their respective ages that when Miss Fallowfield—with nearly half a century's experience behind her—had to fulfil the same duty, she shrank from relying on her own judgment and referred the matter to the Bishop; but when Claude—with only a quarter of a century's wisdom to guide him—was similarly called upon, he had such perfect confidence in his own capacity for the exercise of power that he never consulted the Bishop at all.

The only person whom he did consult was Dagmar. That is to say, he told her what he intended to do, and then waited for her to approve his decision: the usual masculine way of asking feminine advice. And Dagmar knew what was expected of her, and did it.

The woman who is so stupid as to believe that when people ask for her advice they mean her advice and not her approbation, will rarely achieve popularity. It is cruel to give a man a scorpion when he has asked for an egg; but it is also sometimes wise to give him an egg even when he has asked for a scorpion.

"I want to consult you about Dinglewood," Claude began. "The Bishop rode over from Merchester yesterday and told me that it was time for my dear father's successor to be appointed; so I have called in to ask your advice."

They were sitting in the pretty morning room where Charlotte Fallowfield had spent so much of her time, and where Mr. Duncan had first explained to them the intricacies of her last Will and testament.

Dagmar knew that there is only one way in which a woman can make a man follow her advice; and that is to advise him to adopt the course which he had already decided upon before he consulted her. But first she had to discover what that course was.

"It does seem a pity to turn you out of the Vicarage just for the sake of having a regular clergyman at Dinglewood, when what I call the 'char-clergymen' seem to manage quite well."

Claude looked shocked. "Oh! Dagmar, there must be a proper parish priest appointed here in my father's place. The Bishop has been very good in seeing that somebody is sent over every Sunday to take the services; but that does not include any pastoral work; and the village is crying out for a permanent and regular parson to look after it."

"It isn't doing anything of the kind. It is quite contented to go its own way without being bothered by any clerical interference at all."

"Then it ought not to be."

"And it quite enjoys listening to the char-clergymen," Dagmar continued; "especially when they happen to be Theophilus Sprott."

"I enjoy listening to Theophilus Sprott myself," said Claude; "he isn't half a bad preacher."

Dagmar was quick to take a cue. "He isn't; I should call him quite a good one if he didn't remind me so of his mother. But all the time he is in the pulpit I keep imagining him in a black bonnet trimmed with purple roses and yellow forget-me-nots; and there before my mind's eye stands Mrs. Sprott."

"A man is none the worse for being like his mother," argued Claude, who was always romantic over the maternal relationship.

"That depends entirely upon his mother's looks. For my part I cannot see that a resemblance to Mrs. Sprott would prove an additional charm or attraction in anybody."

"I think that Mrs. Sprott is a good woman according to her lights," replied Claude, who did not know how

fiercely those lights beat upon his own personality and blackened every blot.

"I can't bear her; I never could."

Claude's face expressed reproof. "Oh! Dagmar, you shouldn't take those violent prejudices against people; you really shouldn't. It is unworthy of you. One should always try to discover the pure and sweet kernels which are hidden in the shells of unattractive and even repulsive appearances. I grant you that Mrs. Sprott has neither grace nor charm; but I believe that at heart she is a good Christian woman, and that you have no right to say the things against her that you do."

"Well, anyway, the last time I heard her speak of you she called you a fumbling young fool; so I don't believe that her kernel is so exceptionally pure and sweet."

Claude was nonplussed for a moment. Dagmar's arrow had gone home. Then he said, "Even if she does dislike me, she has a perfect right to do so. It doesn't prove that she herself is less worthy of respect."

"Oh! doesn't it? Well, if you want to enjoy the sweetness of Mrs. Sprott's kernel, enjoy it to your heart's content; I wouldn't rob you of it for worlds; only don't ask me to share it with you, for it sticks in my throat."

"It is not Mrs. Sprott's kernel but her son's sermons that I wish to speak about," continued Claude, changing the subject: "I am glad to hear that you agree with me that they are worth listening to."

"Oh! I couldn't have said that, because I don't know; I never did listen to one, so I can't tell whether it would have repaid the effort or not."

"Then I can assure you it would have done so, and that you made a mistake not to listen. Sprott is on the whole an excellent preacher; a little gloomy and depressing, perhaps; but his gloom is always picturesque and his depression poetical."

"To look at, do you mean?" cried Dagmar aghast. "Oh! I don't agree with you. Theophilus may be good, but I really couldn't call him pretty."

Claude smiled indulgently. Slow persons always feel very kindly disposed towards quick ones when they imagine they have convicted the latter of stupidity. "Of course not, you foolish girl! It is only his language that sometimes strikes me as picturesque—never his appearance."

"Did you ever see his lodgings?" asked Dagmar. "His appearance may be bad, but for sheer hideousness it isn't a patch upon his lodgings."

"How did you come to see them?" demanded Claude rather sharply.

"I once went with Aunt Charlotte about some charity or other which he helped with; I fancy it was the distribution of coal and soup tickets, and that it was Theophilus's deal. Anyhow, if I've forgotten the charity, I haven't forgotten what the lodgings were like—squalor that smelt of onions, and poverty expressed in oilcloth. You know the sort."

"I do." Claude smiled. He had a great opinion of Dagmar's cleverness when it in no way collided with his. She certainly had a neat way of putting things, he said to himself approvingly.

"Nevertheless I like Theophilus," Dagmar added; "he admires me."

"Beastly cheek on his part!" exclaimed Claude, the man in him for one instant rising superior to the artist.

"Not at all," she retorted airily; "and if it is, it's the sort of beastly cheek I like. Besides, I don't see any more harm in Theophilus admiring me than in your admiring his mother; and you said most flattering things about her kernel a few minutes ago, if you remember."

"That's entirely different."

"I don't see the difference a bit," replied Dagmar most untruthfully.

"What I am driving at is that it has occurred to me it would be the right and proper thing on my part to offer Theophilus Sprott the living of Dinglewood; and I want your advice upon the subject."

"Have you made up your mind?"

"Practically. But I should like to know what you think before I finally decide."

"I think it is a splendid idea," cried Dagmar, "and so good and generous of you! Because if you do, you'll have to turn out of the Vicarage, you know, to make way for the onions and the oilcloth."

"Of course I know that, you silly child! I shall have to do that anyway now. Whoever I appoint as Vicar, I shall have to turn out of the Vicarage; I cannot go on living there now that my father is dead."

"Then where shall you go?" For a second Dagmar's heart stood still. What would she do if he left? The village would indeed seem asleep or dead if Claude Forrester were away!

"Oh! you my depend upon it I shan't be far afield until my monastery is finished. I shall probably adapt one of the farm-houses on the estate to my own use."

Dagmar breathed freely again. He was not going away after all. But she could not stifle a pang at the thought that it was the monastery that kept him, and not she. And from that moment she began to hate the monastery ten times more bitterly than ever, female jealousy being now added to Protestant disapproval.

"Then if you really don't mind turning out of the Vicarage, I don't see why poor Theophilus shouldn't have the living. He was frightfully disappointed that he didn't get it when your father came. Aunt Charlotte once did intend to give it to him, and then she changed her mind,

and asked the Bishop to give it to Mr. Forrester because she didn't know whom to suggest."

"Why did she change her mind about Sprott?"

"Because he came to dinner and kept on saying the wrong things, and thoroughly roughed-up her and Mr. Duncan. I saw all the time what he was doing, and that he would never step into old Mr. Hanson's shoes if he kept putting his foot into it like that; but I couldn't stop him. I didn't know him well enough to kick him under the table, you see."

"Of course not. It would have been a most improper thing to do."

"I didn't do it, but it would have saved Theophilus a good deal of disappointment and heart-burning if I had! But all the same I'm very glad I didn't, as in that case you'd never have come to Dinglewood, and I should never have known you, but should have spent the rest of my life regretting that we'd never met!"

"It might have been a good thing for you and your aunt if we had never come to Dinglewood," said Claude rather sorrowfully.

"Oh! never say that. Whatever happens, I shall always be glad that you and I were once friends."

"We'll be friends always—not only once," replied Claude. And Dagmar had to be content with that, and to make the best of her half-loaf.

"But before you finally decide to give Theophilus the living, I think it is right for you to know how his mother is working against you," she continued.

"Working against me! What on earth for?" asked Claude, with the surprise of a man who minded his own business, and took it for granted that other people did the same.

"She so disapproves of the monastery."

"Well, so do you, if it comes to that! But that

wouldn't prevent me from offering you the living, if you happened to be a man and in Holy Orders," replied Claude with a smile.

"Oh! mine is only passive resistance; but hers is of the violent and aggressive sort. She has actually been to every cottage in the village and told the people what a wicked young man you are, and what a dangerous and horrible place the monastery will be, till they are as furious with you as if you had proposed to raise a convict-prison or a leper settlement in their midst."

Claude's face darkened. To say a word against the monastery was indeed to touch the apple of his eye. "But surely the people have too much sense to believe such nonsense," he argued.

"Not they! They believe every word the old woman utters as firmly as if she were the author of the four Gospels, or the editor of a daily paper. People always do believe what an ugly woman says, if you will notice. I don't know why hideousness is so convincing; but it is."

"It is very cruel and unjust of her," persisted Claude; "I want my monastery to be regarded as a sort of Home of Rest by the whole neighbourhood, where everybody can always go for spiritual help and refreshment."

"It never will be; Mrs. Sprott has seen to that! She has made the villagers hate the very sight of it even before it is there to be looked at; and the mere mention of it is an eyesore to them already. I never meant to tell you this at all, because I don't see the good of hearing the nasty things that are said of you unless they happen to be nice; but I couldn't—I really couldn't—let you give the living to Theophilus without your knowing what a horrible mother he is descended from."

Claude was silent for a moment, while the passion to strike back—which is inherent in every one of us—stirred his whole nature. Then his still stronger passion for

abstract justice predominated, and he said quietly: "I don't think it is fair to punish a man for what his mother does. It isn't his fault that Mrs. Sprott has such a mistaken idea of duty and such a bitter tongue."

"But she may have inherited them from him, don't you see? The mistaken sense of duty and the bitter tongue may be heirlooms in the Sprott family—in the Salic line, of course, for dear old Timothy hasn't a vestige of either."

"Theophilus is just as likely to resemble his father as his mother," persisted Claude the Just.

"Well, he doesn't outside, so I don't know why he should in. He's got a high, corrugated forehead—like one of those corrugated iron churches—the same as she has; and I daresay it contains a very similar set of brains to hers."

"That doesn't follow at all. Very often the child who most resembles one parent in appearance, most resembles the other in character." Claude could be very obstinate at times.

"Well, I'm thankful that Mrs. Sprott wasn't either of my parents, as I don't know whether it would have been worse to resemble her in appearance or in character," retorted Dagmar; "I can't say which I should have hated to have most—an evil heart or a corrugated iron forehead; though in my case I should have hidden them respectively with a flattering tongue and an amber *toupée*." And then the conversation ended.

Claude was so terribly afraid of allowing any personal feeling to interfere with or bias his judgment, that his sense of justice was apt—like vaulting ambition—to "o'er-leap itself, and fall on the other." He was so set against helping a man because the latter was his friend, that he was almost led to do so if the same happened to be his enemy. In avoiding the sensible, if sometimes doubtful,

Scylla of being too partial a friend, he fell into the utterly insane Charybdis of being too indulgent a foe ; and his justice tempered with mercy was far more comfortable and remunerative to its object than his affection diluted with justice.

Therefore, after the first wave of natural irritation, Dagmar's revelations concerning Mrs. Sprott only rooted him the more firmly in his decision to offer the living to Theophilus. This he accordingly did shortly before Christmas ; and it is needless to add that the offer was straightway accepted.

"I always felt," exclaimed Mrs. Sprott, as she sat with her husband and her son and her beloved Higginsons round the convivial turkey on Christmas Day, "that, in spite of appearances, young Forrester's heart was in the right place ; and his treatment of Theophilus has proved that I was right."

"Still, you didn't altogether believe that young Forrester's monastery was similarly situated, eh, Mrs. Sprott ? " said Mr. Higginson, who would have winked if there had been anybody suitable to wink at. But it is never good manners, or even good policy, to wink at her husband or her son when a lady is making a fool of herself ; and as for winking at his own wife, Mr. Higginson had long ago learnt the futility of that action. It invariably resulted in Mrs. Higginson asking aloud what he was winking at, and then in condemning it as a vulgar habit.

"Perhaps not," replied the proud mother graciously ; "but on the other hand I never actually disapproved of it. I admit, however, that until I rightly apprehended our dear young friend's ideas and intentions in raising this edifice, I was not as enthusiastic over it as I have been since I thoroughly understood what a noble and beneficent institution it is going to be." For so stout a woman Mrs. Sprott was a marvellous acrobat in the art of climbing down.

"No; you weren't exactly what I should call enthusiastic," repeated Mr. Higginson, suppressing another wink.

"But she is now, aren't you, my dear?" added Mr. Sprott, who was sunning himself in the light of his Susanna's recently acquired amiability.

"Yes, Timothy, I am. To my mind it is both touching and beautiful to see a young man with great possessions making so admirable and praiseworthy a use of them. Most young men of that age would be spending the money on themselves, and thinking only of their own pleasures and luxuries; but instead of that, we see Claude Forrester laying out almost his entire fortune upon a home of rest and learning for poor but excellent young men, where they can be trained gratuitously to enter the Church."

"So different, as you say, from the ordinary run of rich young men!" exclaimed Mrs. Higginson. "I remember that my dear papa's friend Lord Undergrowth's eldest son, the Honourable Adolphus Groundrent, was most terribly extravagant, and yet never subscribed to a single local charity—not even to the choir-fund, though he played the banjo himself and was an adept at comic songs. But I always think there is something very dashing and daredevil (if you will excuse the expression, Mrs. Sprott) about Honourables."

"You cannot expect them to be as well brought up as the sons of the clergy," replied Mrs. Sprott; "they have not had the same spiritual advantages. It is in the homes of the clergy that the seed of truth is most successfully sown; as we can see in the case of young Mr. Forrester. His father was a holy man and a good clergyman; and we see the result in his teaching of his son." And Mrs. Sprott sighed as profoundly as if the departed saint had never taken the bread out of the mouth of Theophilus.

The new Vicar had been so absorbed in appreciation of the turkey that hitherto he had held his peace; but now

he took his part in the conversation. "Then the laity should take example from the clergy, and try to bring up their children rather better than they do. Look at myself, for instance, and how my career has been sacrificed to a rotten system of education. If I had been sent to Cambridge, as I ought to have been, instead of to Oxford, do you think that I should have been content to spend the rest of my life in a wretched little village such as this? Not I! By this time I should have been one of the leaders of modern thought, and should have taken my proper place among my intellectual peers. But the perverse fate which has always pursued me, pursues me still, and condemns me to waste my time and my talents on the desert air of a benighted hamlet in the undiscovered heart of the Midlands, in the distasteful and unwelcome *rôle* of an obscure country clergyman."

If Mrs. Sprott had expected her son to be happy when his heart's desire was obtained, she had reckoned without her host, and had underrated the almost sublime strength and power of human discontent.

"Come, come, Theophilus," cried his father encouragingly, "don't be downhearted! You couldn't find a prettier village in England than Dinglewood, nor one with a drier subsoil. For my part I think you are very lucky to have secured such a plum at your age."

"At my age, indeed!" repeated Theophilus. "You talk as if I were a youth of eighteen instead of a man of over forty. Why, at my age I ought to have been in a very different position from my present one; and so I should be if only my talents had been given full scope, and the proper growth of my character not been thwarted at every turn. To be buried alive in a country vicarage, with only rustics to preach to, is a sepulchre from which there is no hope of resurrection."

"Really, Theophilus, I am surprised at you! I thought

you would be so pleased at getting the living at last," remarked his mother, who ought to have known her Theophilus better.

He laughed bitterly. "Pleased, indeed! Do you expect a man to dance merrily at his own funeral? Dinglewood is the grave of all my hopes and ambitions, and I suppose I must accept it as such and not complain; but it is hard for a man to be buried alive at forty! However I ought to be used by now to misfortune and ill-luck, as I have never known anything else since I was born; I will endeavour to endure them with fortitude and not murmur. But I confess it does strike me as a piece of cruel irony when a man's own mother executes a *pas seul* upon his grave, and expects him to do the same."

Mrs. Sprott was somewhat taken aback at being accused of executing a *pas seul;* it was a form of exercise so utterly out of her line. "Well, anyway, it will be a comfortable sitting-down for us all when your father is past work," she said.

But her son speedily disabused her mind of this comforting idea. "It will be nothing of the kind, my dear mother. I shall probably marry before very long, as I do not approve of a celibate clergy; but even if I remain single, I shall never admit yourself and my father to the Vicarage except as temporary guests, as I consider the patriarchal system singularly unadapted to the requirements of modern life. No; I may be condemned to a lot which is utterly uncongenial and distasteful to me—the lot of a country parson,—but there is no need for me to make that lot even worse than it already is by burdening my life with domestic complications."

"I feel sure that you'll be happier here than you think, Theophilus; Dinglewood is such a very dry and bracing spot and so salubrious," said Mr. Sprott, still clinging bravely to the subsoil in his efforts for peace.

"And there is such very good society," added Mrs. Higginson; "real county, and in places quite aristocratic; and to my mind there is no society so agreeable and at the same time so elevating as county society."

But the martyr turned on her like a lion at bay. "And what is the use of good society I should like to know, if by the circumstances of one's birth one is for ever doomed to remain outside it; if a man through no fault of his own, but because he happens to be the son of humble and undistinguished parents, is perpetually condemned to the existence of a pariah?"

His mother—with true maternal solicitude—put her own lacerated feelings on one side, and strove to comfort him. "Clergymen of the Church of England are never pariahs, my dear Theophilus. The cloth always confers an assured social position upon its wearers; that is one of its most valuable characteristics, and one of the reasons why I always set my heart—like Hannah—upon giving up my first-born son to enter the ministry."

"That is so," added Mrs. Higginson. "I remember that dear papa's friend, Lord Oversight, always invited the Vicar of the parish to dinner once a year, if not oftener; and it was generally to meet quite a nice collection of Honourables. And as the Doctor used to say, 'If a man asks you to lunch, he asks you to lunch; but if he asks you to dinner, he asks you to dinner!' And it is late dinner that I consider the hall-mark of respect, and I always shall; and I think a quarter before eight is so much more genteel than seven-thirty."

But Theophilus shook his head and refused comfort. "A man has no chance in the neighbourhood where all his antecedents are known. County society might have thrown open its arms to me had I gone into a new part of the country where nobody knew anything about my forbears, and where I stood entirely upon my own merits

and attainments. But I have made this for ever impossible by accepting the living of Dinglewood. It is all part and parcel of my ill-luck that the only living which has been offered to me is one where it will always be impossible for me to take the social position to which—though not by birth—I am by nature and education entitled."

From the foregoing conversation it will be seen that Claude Forrester's decision to give Theophilus the living of Dinglewood had not made for universal happiness. But of this the young Squire knew nothing, and cared less. At the bar of his own conscience Claude ever stood in fear and trembling; but to the opinions of his neighbours he paid no heed whatsoever. That Theophilus was still as miserable as ever, was nothing to him; he made the appointment because he conceived it to be his duty to do so, and not in order to please Theophilus. That the village as a whole hated the appointment was nothing to him either; he considered that the patron of a living was answerable to God and not to the parishioners.

It was perhaps strange that, in the first instance, the idea of giving the living to the younger Sprott had ever entered Claude's head; but having once penetrated there, in the disguise of a duty, it was not at all strange that Claude persisted in it through thick and thin. In the first place he was obsessed by the notion—frequently dinned into his ears by Theophilus, and by Mrs. Sprott when she had the chance—that Miss Fallowfield had behaved badly towards that young cleric in withholding from him the incumbency of Dinglewood and giving it to Mr. Forrester; and that therefore it was Claude's duty to repair this injustice when he had the opportunity. In the second place Theophilus behaved very differently abroad from what he did at home; and Claude was still young enough to be unduly impressed by anyone who played the part of a martyr. The old find pleasure in the society of happy

people; but the young have a far greater admiration for unhappy ones. In the third place Theophilus really was an excellent preacher. He might fail in practising the Christian graces; but he had no difficulty at all in preaching them, and in preaching them most effectively; and at five-and twenty—sometimes even later—it is not always easy to differentiate between what a man says and what a man is. So that Claude was not altogether without a method in his madness when he made Theophilus Sprott Vicar of Dinglewood.

As the new year grew older and the days longer, Claude became more and more absorbed in the building of the monastery; while Dagmar became more and more convinced of the hopelessness of her love for Claude. The songs of the birds and the voices of the spring tugged at her heartstrings and sometimes almost strained them to bursting point; since it seemed hard that love and happiness were New Year's gifts designed for everybody except herself. But she bore her sorrow with a bold front and a smiling face; and stifled her heart-hunger as well as she could with the half-loaf that seemed her only portion.

Then suddenly—at the beginning of March—a bombshell fell.

Mr. Duncan was sitting as usual in his office, expecting nothing particular to happen, when a cablegram from Australia was brought to him. He hurriedly opened it, and was transfixed to read these words:

"Alive and returning home immediately.—OCTAVIUS RAINBROW."

CHAPTER XVI

OCTAVIUS RAINBROW

It was a bright afternoon in spring when Octavius Rainbrow came back to Merchester. He had telegraphed to his uncle the hour of his arrival; and the latter had invited Claude and Dagmar to be present at the return of the wanderer, in order to hear without further delay all that he had to tell them. He had written no letter and sent no details; all that Mr. Duncan knew was the bare fact of his nephew's survival of the shipwreck; but where that nephew had been in the meantime, and why he had not returned home at once, and whether he were the sole survivor, Mr. Duncan knew no more than the man in the moon.

When the two young people arrived at the lawyer's house they found that Mr. Duncan had already gone to the station to meet his nephew; and they had to possess their souls in as much patience as they could muster between them until his return.

They were naturally very much excited. In the first place with anxiety to hear the last news of their respective father and aunt, and to learn the accurate details of the death of these beloved relatives; and in the second place with curiosity as to whether what Octavius had to tell would in any way interfere with the disposal of Mrs. Forrester's fortune. It was quite possible—as Mr. Duncan had pointed out to them—that Mrs. Forrester might have entrusted Octavius with final instructions in regard to her property; she might even have made a fresh Will and

placed it in his hands; so that it was a matter of no small moment to the two young people to hear the message which Octavius was about to bring.

"I wonder if he'll be altered much, or if he'll still alliterate," said Dagmar, drumming with her fingers on the window-pane. She was on the look-out for the traveller and his uncle.

"I don't know," replied Claude, aimlessly walking about the room, and not attending in the least to what his companion was saying.

"I don't expect that even a shipwreck would be able to knock the nonsense out of Octavius," she went on, womanlike hiding her anxiety beneath a multitude of words without knowledge; "'ten thousand fleets would sweep over him in vain.'"

Claude said nothing.

"I can't think why he didn't come home before," Dagmar continued; "he can't have been at the bottom of the sea all this time, you know; and it was very horrid of him to stay on there and enjoy himself when he must have known how badly we wanted to hear all about dear Aunt Charlotte and Mr. Forrester." Here her voice broke a little, but she quickly steadied it and went on bravely, "But it was just like Octavius to think about himself and his own pleasure, and never to give a thought to our anxiety and misery; and now that he is no longer dead I don't mind saying things against him—which I didn't really much mind when he was. Oh, I say, here they are!" she added, as a cab drew up at the door.

It was a different Octavius that entered Mr. Duncan's drawing-room from the Octavius who had left it just a year ago. He looked thirty years older than he had looked then: his hair was grey, his face lined and worn, and his shoulders were bent like those of an old man. As he shook hands with Claude and Dagmar he could with

difficulty restrain his tears. He was evidently still suffering from the effects of the nervous shock which had prostrated his whole system. He had met Death face to face ; and the meeting had left its permanent mark upon him.

After he had partaken of some refreshment and recovered himself slightly, he begged his uncle to allow him to tell his tale ; and Mr. Duncan, nothing loth, consented. For the latter was as anxious as were his young clients to hear the authentic story of the wreck of the *Euroclydon* ; and his nephew had been too much upset at meeting him to be able to impart any information at all on their short drive from the station.

"I will try my best to give an accurate and authentic account of all that happened," Octavius began ; "but you must be patient with me if my narrative strays and stumbles. I have been very ill for months, and my memory is not what it was."

"Never mind, my boy," said his uncle kindly. "Do the best you can, and we will let our imagination fill in the rest."

"It was when we were about half-way across the Indian Ocean that the monsoons set in," Octavius continued ; "and set in with unprecedented vigour and violence. For a few days we withstood their onslaught : but at last they proved even too much for so tried and tested a vessel as the *Euroclydon*, and we were grounded upon a coral reef. I do not exactly know what happened, nor the technical reasons why the ship broke loose from all control ; I conclude that the force and fury of the winds and waves in some way deranged the machinery, so that the crew had no longer any control over the motion of the vessel ; all I do know is that for a day and a night we drifted about at the mercy of the storm, and finally came to grief upon a coral reef in mid-ocean."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Dagmar.

Octavius shuddered. "It was a perfect nightmare of horror—too terrible even to think about!"

"Then don't think about it more than you can help," his uncle wisely counselled him; "tell us the whole story once for all, and then strive to banish it from your thoughts for ever."

"For two nights and a day—two nights and a day that seemed longer than eternity—we remained stranded, watching in the wild hope that some passing vessel might come to our rescue. But in vain. And on the morning of the second day the captain gave the order to lower the boats, for the ship was fast going to pieces and could not possibly hold together much longer."

"And where was my father all that time?" asked Claude.

"He was acting like the Christian hero that he was, cheering and encouraging the people, and sometimes praying with them; and he was as calm and composed as if he were in his own church."

"And Aunt Charlotte?"

"She also was an example of firmness and fortitude, Miss Silverthorne; doing all she could to succour her suffering sisters."

"Well, what happened then?" asked Mr. Duncan.

"The boats were lowered and the order given that the women and children should enter them first. And now comes the shameful part of my story, the disgrace of which will dog my footsteps to the end of my days. I was afraid! And I pushed forward and jumped into one of the boats among the women and children before anyone could prevent me!" And Octavius hid his face in his hands with a groan.

There was an awkward pause—the pause which always follows the confession of an unpardonable action. Mr. Duncan was the first to break it.

"Never mind, my boy, it is too late to alter it now, and it is no use crying over spilt milk."

"There is no condoning an act of cowardice such as mine. I know how you must all condemn me; but not so severely as I condemn myself!" And poor Octavius looked appealingly at his two young judges.

Claude's face like Claude's heart was as adamant. He had no pardon and no pity for a convicted coward; so he maintained a stern silence. But not so Dagmar. She saw deeper than the young ascetic could see, and pronounced judgment accordingly. "But you have had the courage to tell us this, which you needn't have done. If you had said that you behaved like a hero, we should have believed you, and there would have been nobody to contradict the story. So I don't see that you are such a coward after all! The coward who has the courage to confess he is a coward must be rather a brave person. I think the fact that you confessed when you needn't have done so will be a decided feather in your crown."

The ready tears filled Octavius's eyes. "Thank you, thank you, Miss Silverthorne! You are the first to restore to me a shred of my self-respect."

"Of course there is only one way of undoing what has once been done," continued Dagmar; "and that is to do better next time." She spoke as if shipwrecks were usual and frequent occurrences.

"Yes, yes, Octavius, Miss Dagmar is right. Your courage in confessing your cowardice in a measure condones it—at least in my humble judgment," remarked Mr. Duncan.

But Claude said never a word.

"In the same boat as myself," Octavius went on, "was Mrs. Forrester. She was simply splendid in her endeavours to soothe the suffering women and to cheer the poor little children."

"And my father?" Claude tried in vain to steady his voice as he asked the question.

"He remained upon the sinking ship."

"Perhaps he too escaped in one of the boats," suggested Mr. Duncan.

But Octavius shook his head. "No, he did not. Ours was the last boat to be lowered. It was only when I saw it was my final chance that I forgot my manhood. And we left Mr. Forrester among others on the ship."

"Then you have no idea how long the vessel remained above water?"

"Yes, uncle, I have. It turned over before our very eyes while we were still in sight. The sea had calmed by that time, and the atmosphere was very clear; and when we were about four or five miles distant, we saw the ship heel right over and float along keel uppermost, so that it was impossible for anyone to remain on it after that. And that was the end of the *Euroclydon*."

"Dear me, dear me!" was all that Mr. Duncan said; but his face was very grave and his thoughts were busy. Here indeed was a new development of affairs!

"And what happened to Aunt Charlotte?" asked Dagmar.

"As I have said, she was very brave, never thinking of her own necessities, but ministering instead to the needs of others. And yet her case was an especially sad one: a bride bereft of her bridegroom on her honeymoon—a widow almost as soon as she was wed!"

"He isn't so bad after all," said Dagmar to herself; "he is still able to alliterate. Our Richard will soon be himself again." Aloud she remarked, "That was just like Aunt Charlotte."

"It was, it was! As it was just like me to fail at the final moment, and to write 'Tekel' in letters of flaming fire across my own name."

"Never mind about your own name; tell us more about the shipwreck," Dagmar pleaded.

Octavius shuddered. "Then followed an awful time; I can hardly bear to think of it even yet! For two days and two nights we drifted in that little boat across the waste of waters, absolutely subject to the wild will of the waves. We had very little food, and nothing to drink; and every few hours one or more of the occupants of the boat died and had to be thrown overboard. Oh, it was a grim and ghastly experience! I wonder I ever lived through it!"

Dagmar's eyes were full of tears. "It must have been awful!"

"It was. Words can never describe how awful! Four of the children died in my own arms, and I had to fling their frail little bodies into the sea myself."

"And where were the mothers?" asked Claude.

"Dead already of exposure and privation." And Octavius was so much overcome at the memory of that dreadful voyage that for a minute he could say no more.

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Duncan, carefully wiping his spectacles. "It was indeed a terrible business. I, too, wonder that anyone survived to tell the tale!"

"But as he did survive to tell it, he'd better do so," suggested Dagmar, with her usual common sense.

Octavius went on: "At the end of the second night there was no one left alive in the boat except Mrs. Forrester and myself; and she was by that time quite delirious. All that day she lingered on in a state of lamentable exhaustion, babbling in snatches about bygone days."

The tears were now running down Dagmar's cheeks. "What sort of things did she talk about? Did she mention me?"

"Not as you are now, Miss Silverthorne. But she

kept saying, 'Give me the baby to hold, Phœbe; give me little Dagmar to nurse for a minute, she is such a dear little thing!' And then she said, 'How I envy you, Phœbe, to have a dear little baby of your very own!' I think that she was talking about you then, but about you when you were an infant. She seemed quite to have forgotten the fact that you had grown up."

"Did she say anything about her money, and what she meant to do with it?" asked Mr. Duncan.

"Not a word. She appeared to have forgotten her fortune entirely, and everything connected with it."

"Then I fear we can get no further light there." And Mr. Duncan sighed.

"What did she say about my father?" Claude inquired.

"She said never a word about him either; never once mentioned his name. But she kept talking to somebody called Bertie, and begging him to come back to her soon, and to be very careful of his health while he was away. If she said it once she said it fifty times, 'Bertie dear, be sure you take care; take your top-coat with you, it is getting so dreadfully cold.' I haven't an idea whom she meant by Bertie, but it was someone whose health gave her great anxiety."

Dagmar smiled through her tears. "How funny to talk about a top-coat when one is dying! I thought people always talked about angels and golden harps and things of that kind then."

But Mr. Duncan did not smile; the pathos of the top-coat had touched his heart as no conversation about angels or golden harps could have done. True pathos is like true humour in that it is rarely if ever visible to the untrained eye of youth. Eyes have to be washed by many tears before they are able to discover the humour and the pathos underlying the common things of every-day life.

"She lingered on until sunset," continued Octavius, "and then she too went out into the Unknown and left me absolutely alone. And after that I remember no more. I must have become unconscious and delirious as she and the others had done; and while I was in that condition a ship, bound for Australia, sighted the boat and saved my life. Thus it happened that I was the only survivor of those on board the ill-fated *Euroclydon*."

"But why did you not communicate with me at once?" was Mr. Duncan's most pertinent question. "All this happened nearly twelve months ago."

"For the very good reason that when at last I recovered consciousness I did not recover my memory; and for many months I had no idea who I was or where I had come from. Some very kind people on board took pity on me and my forlorn condition, and insisted upon my accompanying them to their own home when we landed at Melbourne. And with them I lived until suddenly my memory came back to me, and I remembered who I was and all that had happened to me. And then I at once cabled to you, and came home by the next mail." And, having finished his story, Octavius fell back in his seat exhausted.

"There, there, that will do for the present," said his uncle; "you have had enough fatigue and excitement for one day, my boy, and you must now go to your room and rest. And as for you, my dear young friends," he added, turning to the others, "I will ride over to Dinglewood tomorrow morning and discuss matters more fully with you. For you must understand that this story of my nephew's will probably entirely alter the present state of affairs, since now it seems proved beyond a doubt that Mrs. Forrester did indeed survive her husband."

CHAPTER XVII

THE VERDICT OF THE JURY

THE return of Octavius certainly did alter the aspect of affairs.

It upset the decision of the Court which had been based only upon probabilities; and now the case had to be laid before a jury, whose business it was to test and to try and true deliverance make between the rival claims of Claude Forrester and Dagmar Silverthorne; and to decide whether the story of Octavius Rainbrow was to be considered as trustworthy evidence or no. If his tale were true and Mrs. Forrester had indeed survived her husband by a couple of days, there was no doubt that her legatee had pre-deceased her, and that therefore she practically had died intestate; in which case her entire fortune devolved upon Dagmar as her next of kin. Claude had no possible claim upon a fortune which had never belonged to his father; that was absolutely clear; since it was only as his father's son that he now held possession of the late Mrs. Forrester's property. If that property had never been Mr. Forrester's, it could certainly never be Claude's. This was a fact established beyond all dispute. Therefore all that remained was to discover, if possible, whether the evidence of a man who had sustained a terrible nervous shock, and had in consequence completely lost his memory for the space of nearly a year, was sufficiently trustworthy to affect the disposal of close on a million of money. For by this time Miss Fallowfield's fortune was rapidly accumulating to that sum, in addition to the hundred thousand pounds settled upon Dagmar.

Naturally the building operations in Dinglewood Park were stopped at once. If Claude had no money, Claude could erect no monastery; that was an obvious conclusion; and it seemed as if the young man's day-dreams were doomed to be unfulfilled after all.

It was a hard time for Claude; harder than Dagmar, with all her love and sympathy with him, could imagine. As long as the course of a woman's true love and domestic happiness runs smooth, little else has power to upset her. Besides the defects of our qualities, we have also the advantages of our defects; and the advantage of a somewhat limited horizon is that it naturally includes fewer mountainous mole-hills than a wide one; while the narrower the way we travel, the smaller the number of lions that can frequent it. Women have much to be thankful for in that, as a rule, they do not see farther than their own garden wall. If they saw farther, they would probably fare worse; and a garden wall is by no means a depressing prospect — especially when there are olive branches growing up it. Yet Woman refuses to be content with her Eden, and clamours for the apple of Parliamentary franchise, and for the knowledge of political good and evil! Foolish Woman!

But the garden wall is not a seemly horizon line for the masculine eye, and ought never to be regarded as such. For weal or for woe Man is called to the duties and cares and responsibilities of the larger world which lies beyond his own domain. In his ear the call of the road is ever sounding, telling him to go forth to seek adventures along the broad highway of progress and in the busy haunts of men; or else he hears a voice from the far-off mountains, bidding him climb alone to the summit of some solitary peak, and there stand and hide his face in his mantle while the Glory of the Lord passes by.

The foolish woman is for ever fighting against the great

law of nature, and striving either to keep her husband beside her within the precincts of her garden wall, or else to follow him in his journeyings across that wider land which is not—and never can be—a home of hers. But the wise woman accepts facts as they are, and is content patiently to cultivate her own garden plot until it rejoices and blossoms as the rose; and to bid her husband God-speed when he goes forth on his way to do his duty in that sphere of life to which it has pleased God to call him.

But it is difficult for even the wisest of women fully to understand that no amount of romantic joy and domestic peace can abundantly satisfy a man's soul as it can abundantly satisfy hers; and that he must still take his place in the outer world which belongs to him, or else he will break his wings against that garden gate, which to her is a refuge and a shelter, but to him an iron grating of prison bars. And although Dagmar Silverthorne was both clever and sympathetic, she was not yet old enough to be wise: therefore she failed to understand that the love of no woman—be she never so amiable and charming—can fully compensate a man for the overthrow of his life's ambition. She had never known how much the idea of the monastery meant to Claude; so she did not know now how bitterly he felt the frustration of that idea.

To her it seemed that he resented the fact that—through no fault of her own—she would probably supplant him in the place which had been allotted to him, and take from him the fortune which had once been considered his; and she—justly or unjustly—resented his resentment. In her eyes his attitude of mind appeared somewhat selfish and ungenerous; she had not visited it upon him when he was pronounced to be the rightful heir to her aunt's fortune; so why should he visit it upon her when the position was reversed? Her argument seemed reasonable enough and her grievance a real one; but had she seen

deeper she would have convicted herself of injustice. For it was no mere selfish disappointment that was at the root of Claude's agony. Had it been simply his own personal interests that he had been bidden to sacrifice, he would have done so unflinchingly and without a regret. But it was the dream and ambition of his life—his conception of the duty which he owed to God and Man—the embodiment of his highest ideals of service—that he was suddenly called upon to renounce. No man worthy of the name could lightly give up all this; and to a man of Claude Forrester's type it was an especially painful sacrifice.

For many weeks things were as much at a standstill as they had been before the Court gave its decision six months previously. Once more nobody knew whether Miss Fallowfield's fortune belonged by right to Claude Forrester or to Dagmar Silverthorne. This time the case had to be tried by a jury, as it was now a question of the weighing of evidence rather than of the interpretation of abstract law. And by a jury it was duly tried; with the result that—after much questioning and cross-questioning of Octavius Rainbrow—this jury decided that the young man's evidence was trustworthy and his story true. No amount of brow-beating and cross-examination shook Rainbrow in his main statement of facts; while the medical evidence all went to prove that the loss of his memory had been but temporary, and that now it was as much to be depended upon as it ever had been. Moreover the jury, unlike the Law, was amenable to the arguments of common sense; and—other things being equal—it appeared far more compatible with abstract justice and equity that Mrs. Forrester's fortune should descend to her next of kin, than to a son of her husband by his first marriage.

So the decision of the Probate Court was reversed, owing to the introduction of fresh evidence; and Dagmar

Silverthorne became after all the possessor of Miss Fallowfield's fortune.

But if abstract justice and the opinion of the neighbourhood were equally satisfied with the decision of the Court of Appeal, this was by no means the case with Claude Forrester. To him the decision was a catastrophe of appalling magnitude—the downfall of his ambition and the destruction of his dearest hope. But it was something more than that, though that of itself was fairly hard to bear. It was the refusal of Heaven to receive the service which he offered—the pronouncement of the Almighty that he himself and the work of his hands were alike unworthy of the Divine acceptance. Not unto him was to be allowed the honour of building a temple in the centre of Mershire where the servants of the Master should continue a perpetual memory of His precious Death until His coming again ; not unto him was to be granted the glory of dedicating one of the sweetest spots on earth to the service of the Most High. It is always hard on a man when his gifts to others are flung back in his face ; but when the offering thus rejected is no gift to man but a sacrifice unto the Lord, then that man's burden is almost greater than he can bear. And this it was now with Claude Forrester.

He wondered vaguely what he had done to deserve this thing. Had he been prepared to make a graven image of the monastery and to bow down to it and worship it ? Or had he thought more of himself and his own share in it, than of Him to Whose glory it was to be built ? Surely there must be some flaw in either the character of the worshipper or in the quality of the thing sacrificed, or else the Almighty would never have rejected the offering.

But bitter as Claude's cup was, it did not seem to be full until Dagmar herself came to him and asked him to

undertake the building of her orphanage on the same lines as he had designed for the monastery. Then indeed his cup of misery overflowed. To take the glorious edifice which he had planned as a hostel for weary pilgrims and a temple to the living God, and to turn it into a nursery and a schoolroom for a lot of squalling children—this was sacrilege indeed! He shuddered at the mere thought of it! Instead of tired fathers and eager youths sitting together in the dim and cool refectory while one of the number read aloud to them as they ate some record of the wonderful works of God, so that their souls might be strengthened and refreshed at the same time as their bodies, noisy infants would clamour there for their food and consume the same to an accompaniment of childish chatter. Instead of the sacring bell proclaiming from the tower to the outer world that the daily Commemoration of the One Oblation once offered had been duly enacted, it would merely clang noisily across the valley to call the children to their lessons or their meals! Was there ever such a travesty as this of all that was best and holiest and most beautiful in life? Claude wondered; forgetting in his misery that He, in Whose Presence there is no need for any temple, took a little child and set him up in the midst of His disciples.

Nevertheless Claude could not make up his mind to reject Dagmar's proposal altogether. Doubtless it would have been more consistent with his character and views had he done so; but no man's actions are invariably "in drawing," and the purely artistic joy of creation—quite apart from the significance of the thing created—had so entered into his blood, that to forego the embodiment of the ideal he had conjured would indeed be to him a cutting off of the right hand and a plucking out of the right eye. The passion of creating was upon him, and he must create; even though the work of his hands was doomed to ignoble

uses. When once the cry, "Produce, produce!" has sounded in the artist's ears he cannot gainsay the call. He must do the best that is in him to do, be that best intrinsically admirable or worthless. For the time being he has no concern with results; he can only take his infinitesimal share in the Divine Accomplishment of bringing forth something out of nothingness, and transforming darkness into light.

Once more the artist nature in Claude proved stronger than his manhood; and—rather than renounce his great work altogether—he consented to carry it on in the form of an orphanage at Dagmar's request. While she—poor ignorant child!—imagined that she was making things easier for Claude by appointing him the architect of her Children's Home. So do well-meaning men and women hinder each other when they desire to help!

"As for the chapel, I suppose we'd better still use it as a chapel," she said to him when they were discussing the orphanage together; having once more put it into the builders' hands, and resumed the work—although on a different footing—which the arrival of Rainbrow and his subsequent revelations had abruptly brought to a standstill.

"Of course. As what else could you use it?" demanded Claude somewhat sternly.

"Oh! I thought it might come in nicely for a gymnasium or something of that kind. You see, it isn't consecrated yet—or even built, if you come to that; so there would be nothing wicked in using it for anything that we fancied."

Claude fairly shuddered. The chapel, as Dagmar said, might not even be built as yet; nevertheless it was already consecrated in his own mind as a resting-place for the Ark of the Lord.

But the girl, totally unconscious of his agony, continued

airily: "Of course I think it would be dreadfully wicked to use a consecrated building for anything worldly or frivolous; but a building that might have been consecrated but hasn't, is quite a different thing. Just as marrying a girl who once thought of going into a convent is quite a different thing from eloping with a full-grown nun. As a matter of fact, it would be difficult to find a girl who hadn't made up her mind at least once in her life to go into a convent. I was very keen on it myself at one time; it sounded so calm and restful and Sunday-afternoony. But I've outgrown all that some time ago; and now—as you know—I'm dead against nunneries and monasteries and everything in that style."

"I do not follow your line of argument," replied Claude coldly. "To my mind a sacred thing is not a secular thing suddenly adapted to religious uses, but something which is in its very essence sacred and set apart. The real *religieuse* is not an embittered spinster who gives herself to God because Man finds no attraction in her, but a woman in whom the passion of religion is so strong that human love seems poor and flat beside it. She is set apart from her earliest infancy, by her own nature and character, for something purer and higher than the ordinary lot of woman. And in the same way I think that a church or a chapel should be no common school-room or music-hall adapted to Sabbath observances; but a temple the very building of which is an act of worship, and every stone of which is separately dedicated to the Lord."

"I don't see that," Dagmar argued; "a woman who had been very worldly might suddenly become extremely religious and so make an excellent nun; and a building which had been intended for something quite different, might have an altar and an organ and a few stained windows put in it, and so become a really beautiful church."

"Things and people don't ever become anything

different from what they really are. They may develop; but they don't change."

"What a dull, horrid theory!"

"A true one, nevertheless. Time and circumstances may develop two things or two people who seemed almost identical to begin with, into two things or two people who appear absolutely dissimilar. But no actual alteration has taken place. The germ of what they are at the end was there at the beginning, or else it couldn't have been developed."

"Then don't you believe in great saints suddenly becoming great sinners?"

"No, I don't," replied Claude, who dearly loved the sound of his own voice—especially when it was sounding for the benefit of those persons who did not know as much as he did about the matter under discussion. (In which, perhaps—considering his sex—he was not altogether peculiar.) "When people who have seemed to be good, suddenly turn out to be bad, it doesn't mean that they have really changed; it only means that the badness has come to the top, so to speak, like cream. It must always have been there in its essence, though it hadn't congealed into sight. I am tired of hearing people say, 'So-and-so would have been such a good man if only he had been better off,' or 'So-and-so would have been such a nice woman if only she had married.' It is all humbug! If So-and-so isn't a good man in his poverty, he wouldn't have been any better if he'd had ten thousand a year; and if So-and-so is a bad-tempered old maid, she would have made miserable any fool who had been so misguided as to marry her. Therefore let us be thankful that he has no money to waste and she no husband to scarify!"

"Well, now, look at me, for instance," said Dagmar, who always loved if possible to turn the conversation to herself and her peculiarities. (In which—considering

her sex—she also was not altogether peculiar.) "Don't you think that I am capable of turning out into two totally different sorts of woman?"

"You are capable of developing either side of your character, if that is what you mean; but you are not capable of becoming anything which you are not now potentially."

Dagmar shook her pretty head and sighed. "I may become a horrid and spiteful old maid, or a perfectly delightful married woman, or a very serious and religious nun."

"You can never be anything but perfectly delightful, whatever you are; and you couldn't be horrid and spiteful if you tried. You will always be charming—and a trifle frivolous—and in no possible circumstances could I imagine you as a nun."

"That reminds me," Dagmar added, still thoughtful, "that I never can quite make up my mind what sort of an old lady I am going to be—whether I shall be calm and dignified, and read the Bible in a lace cap; or whether I shall be fashionable and witty, and tell *risqué* stories in a grey *toupée*. And I think I really ought to decide soon, so as to begin reading up for the part. What should you advise?"

Claude smiled in spite of himself. Dagmar might build horrible orphanages and totally fail to perceive the deeper meanings of life, but that did not prevent her eyes from being remarkably pretty. "I can only repeat that whatever you are, you will always be perfectly charming."

"But however charming I may be, you don't approve of me," retorted the shrewd Dagmar.

"No; that is true. I admire you, but I don't approve of you."

"Nor of my orphanage?"

"Certainly not. I don't even admire that. I think it a monstrous idea to turn a House of God into a children's nursery—an act of absolute sacrilege."

"Then why are you willing to aid and abet me in doing so?" asked Dagmar, animated by the hope that this inconsistency on Claude's part was brought about by the power of her own charms.

But this hope was doomed to speedy destruction; Claude was still young enough to tell the truth, even to a woman. "Because I am so wrapt up in the idea of the monastery I was about to build—it has become so much a part of my very nature—that I would rather see it degraded to the uses of a *crèche* than not build it at all. Can't you understand? I love my work for its own sake—not because it is mine—and I would sooner resign it into other hands and give it up to other uses, than utterly destroy the creation of my brain."

"I see: like Solomon and the baby, whose mother would rather give up being its mother than have the poor little thing cut up into pieces. I can quite understand that principle with regard to babies; but I don't know that I should have applied it to monasteries myself."

"But don't you know that a man's work is to him what a woman's children are to her—the end and aim of his existence, the fulfilment of that for which he was created? Why, your very Bible tells you that."

"Oh, if you begin quoting the Bible, you'll soon see that an orphanage is a much better and more religious idea altogether than a monastery," replied Dagmar, who, womanlike, could never allow a sleeping dog even a short siesta undisturbed; "the Bible is always very keen on the beauty of children and the importance of being kind to them, and the wickedness of doing anything to annoy them. But I never found a word in it, from Genesis to

Revelation, in favour of monasteries and convents and monks and nuns."

Claude shivered slightly, but did not speak. Like all people who are not endowed with a spirit of reverence, Dagmar had a terrible knack of unconsciously overturning altars and dancing upon graves. "But I'll tell you what," she added generously, "you shall make the orphanage as much like a monastery to look at as you possibly can; and the chapel shall be a real chapel, where the children can have prayers every day and Sunday-school upon Sundays. Surely that will satisfy you!" Again like all people who are not endowed with the spirit of reverence, Dagmar was also extremely good-natured and easy to get on with. The reverent souls are certainly those most suited to Sabbath-day needs; it is to them that the inner sanctuaries of life are opened and its secret vespers sung, and it is they who are now and again permitted to gaze between the folds of the blue and purple veil at the two winged cherubim overlaid with gold. But they are not so well suited to "the level of every day's most quiet need" as are their less gifted brothers and sisters. They are always getting their toes trodden upon in the hustle and bustle of this workaday world; and somehow they seem to have more toes than ordinary folk, or at any rate they are more prone to leave them lying about to trip up the careless and unwary.

Yes; for high days and holy days give us as our fellow-worshippers those pure and reverent spirits to whom every hearthstone is an altar, and every common shrub "a bush aflame with God"; but for the rest of the week give us as our comrades those less rare and less radiant souls who take life as they find it, and expect no impossibilities of either persons or circumstances; who see the humorous rather than the deeper side of things, and who love their fellow-creatures for being human instead of blaming them for not

being divine! And, when all is said and done, there are six week-days to one Sunday in each of the fifty-two weeks of the year.

"I can't help wishing," remarked Claude, after a short pause in which he and his companion had stood contemplating the barely-begun building in silence, "that there had been an old abbey on this spot which I could have adapted, rather than having to erect a place brand-new from the foundations. It would have been so much greater a thing actually to work with those grand master-craftsmen of old, and to complete—or at any rate restore—what they had begun, than feebly to try to imitate their pattern and example."

"Oh! I don't agree with you. I think it is always a far better plan to build new houses altogether than to begin tinkering the old places and trying to turn them into new ones."

"There are no associations about new buildings," argued Claude.

"But there are far more satisfactory drains and bells and gas and water; and things like that affect your comfort much more than associations do."

"I'm not sure about that." The historic instinct was strong in Claude. "To me there is something very compelling about a place full of historic associations. It seems almost as if the events of the past had permeated the very atmosphere, and made it different from the ordinary, brand-new, jerry-built towns and suburbs of to-day."

"Still I think that what you call the brand-new, jerry-built suburbs of to-day are much the healthiest," persisted the ever-practical Miss Silverthorne.

"There is a health of the mind as well as a health of the body, and the mind has far more to feed upon in old places than in new ones."

"The health of the mind doesn't count for much if the

body is laid up with typhoid ; and it doesn't signify how much the mind has got to feed upon if the body has lost its appetite."

"But, my dear Dagmar, why confuse historic associations with defective sanitation ? The two are not necessarily synonymous."

"They often are ; and even if they are not, they generally come to the same thing in the end."

"Not a bit of it ; old houses can be as perfectly drained as new ones, if only people will go to the expense and trouble of doing it. And, when you come to that, the modern jerry-builder is not invariably an Æsculapius. I have known even new houses fail as ideal health-resorts."

"And even if the drains are all right in old houses, there are sure to be ghosts ; and they are quite as bad in their way, and more frightening at the time if less dangerous afterwards."

"Why, Dagmar, whatever are you thinking of ? I should have thought you were far too modern a young woman to believe in ghosts ?"

"So I am. I don't believe in them an atom ; but I'm awfully frightened of them all the same."

Claude condescended to laugh. He never liked Dagmar so much as when she proved herself his intellectual inferior. Though still young enough to be somewhat of a prig, he had a good deal of the regular masculine element in him. And the priggishness would soon be outgrown. Most men who have anything in them have passed by that way in their time.

"It is very illogical of you to be frightened of ghosts if you don't believe in them," he said.

"Not a bit of it. I don't believe in Mrs. Sprott, but I'm dreadfully frightened of her all the same. You can easily be frightened at what you don't believe in."

The protective instinct was roused in Claude at once ;

there was something very alluring in the combination of fear and Dagmar. "Why are you frightened of a tiresome old woman like that?"

"Because she has a bitter tongue; and women with bitter tongues are always to be feared. Even if you don't believe a word they say, you can't help thinking that there must be some truth in it; and that is why they are so dangerous."

"Some people say that you have a fairly sharp tongue yourself, Miss Dagmar," suggested Claude slily.

"Well then, I haven't; and I give you full authority to contradict that statement whenever you hear it. Why, I never accused anyone of not being in *Burke's Landed Gentry* in my life; and no power on earth would ever induce me to say that I thought another woman was a day over five-and-thirty! And what can be more amiable than that?"

"Nothing, certainly. If only you had the historic instinct and were not quite so appallingly modern, you would be an ideal character."

Dagmar sighed. "Yes, I'm modern; I admit that; you might almost call me 'jerry-built.' My mind is like a suburban villa and yours is like a medieval cathedral; and that's why we don't always see eye to eye. Villas and cathedrals rarely command the same view."

"There I cannot commend you. The passion for what is new is a passion which I utterly fail to understand; yet it has prevailed from the Athenians downwards. New houses, new trees, new religions; they are as popular in London to-day as they were in Athens at the time of Saint Paul! We are too clever nowadays to believe the dogmas of a Church which was founded upon Apostolic teaching two millenniums ago; but we are still simple enough to accept without demur the dicta of to-day's newspaper. We cannot stoop to find our way to Heaven according to the

directions given in the Bible ; but we humbly submit to be guided to London by such instructions as our finite minds can wring from the infinite obscurities of Bradshaw ! Aladdin's uncle knew human nature when he went about offering to exchange new lamps for old ones. It is a bargain which never ceases to attract the ordinary public."

"It rather attracts me," admitted the girl. "Do you know, Claude, I am beginning to be afraid that I have got a thoroughly commercial and middle-class mind, as opposed to your delightfully romantic and medieval one ; and mine isn't therefore a patch upon yours for beauty and general picturesqueness ! I love a bargain, and batten upon roast beef, and thrill at Handel's music, and believe that the whole duty of man consists in attending matins every Sunday at eleven o'clock. Could anything be more absolutely dull and respectable and middle-class, I should like to know ?" And Dagmar fairly groaned.

Claude smiled. "Yes, it is pretty bad, I must confess."

"It couldn't well be worse, in its own line. But middle-class respectability isn't a bad line, taking it all round ; it wears well and washes well—or rather it doesn't want quite so much washing and white-washing as some other more daring and more effective lines require. So I think on the whole I shall stick to it, and go on giving away my old lamps for new ones, and rejoicing over the bargain."

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you, Dagmar."

"Of course you wouldn't ; that's my whole point. If you were me, you'd always be exchanging brand-new incandescent gas-burners for farthing rushlights, and saying how clever you were ; and if you could only succeed in getting a flint and steel instead of a safety match-box, you'd simply scream with pure joy. But I must be going or else I shall be late for lunch ; and unpunctuality is the

one unpardonable sin in the Perkins' eye. That is the only way in which the beloved Perkins shows that she is an old maid ; she seems to think that lunch is like a marriage, so that if it isn't over before three o'clock it isn't legal. Old maids do get fussy, don't they ? I wonder if it is because single life produces fussiness, or because men only marry the unfussy women ! What do you think ? Which is cause and which is effect ? "

And, without waiting for a reply, Dagmar dashed off across the grass in the direction of Dinglewood Hall, leaving Claude lost in meditation upon that strange tendency in human nature to exchange the old and valuable for the new and inferior.

And what an unaccountable passion it is when one comes to think of it ; and yet how prevalent ! Breathes there a man in this modern England of ours with soul so dead but that at some time or another he has not yielded to the almost universal temptation to cut down, in a few fatal minutes, trees which it would take a century to reproduce ; and then endeavour to fill their place by dwarfed and squalid shrubs ; and—which is stranger still—has counted the same to himself for righteousness ? Breathes there a town council, or even a county one, with spirit so unurban and impolitic that it has never once pulled down old and beautiful and well-built houses in order to erect new and vulgar and unsubstantial villas in their stead ? If such there be, let me make a friend of that man ; and give me a vote for the re-election of that town or county council !

Gardeners are never so happy as when they are pruning and disfiguring their rose-trees—farmers never so blissful as when they are changing their hedges from things of beauty to mere boundary lines. The passion for hedging and ditching seems to be implanted in every masculine breast ; and as it is not in itself an evil passion, it should be

permitted within limits. But if a man must hedge and ditch—and apparently he must—why cannot he hedge and ditch with rows of pea-sticks set up for the purpose, instead of making the landscape hideous with amputated trees and maimed hedge-rows ? Surely he would be just as happy, and the country would be ten times more beautiful in consequence.

CHAPTER XVIII

LAST WILLS AND TESTAMENTS

ALTHOUGH Claude Forrester might be heartbroken at the dissolution of the monastery of his dreams, Dinglewood rejoiced at the substitution of an orphanage in its place: which joy was openly expressed at the usual place for such expressions—the weekly sewing-party at Mrs. Peppercorn's.

"I'm very glad to hear that the Law has come to its senses at last and has given Miss Fallowfield's fortune where Miss Fallowfield's fortune was due," remarked the lady of the house, when all the company were collected and the needles threaded, and before the early beginnings of the Church had emerged from their resting-place in Mrs. Sprott's bag; "namely, to Miss Fallowfield's own niece."

"And that dear young lady has put away all Mr. Claude Forrester's Popish notions of building a convent for the clergy," added Mrs. Paicey; "and is turning it into an orphanage for dear little children, as it were, instead."

"It is thankless work bringin' up other folk's childern," sighed Mrs. Mawer; "seein' that half of 'em are bound to turn out bad."

"Nothing like as bad as monks and nuns, Mrs. Mawer," retorted Miss Skinner.

Here little Miss Tovey rushed in. "Oh! no, Miss Skinner dear; I think you are quite mistaken. To me there is something very beautiful in the idea of convents and monasteries, and of people living together bound to

each other by their desire to serve their Maker. It seems somehow like a large family, with God for their Father, all living together in their Father's house, and doing His bidding. And it is so beautiful to think that God is ready to offer a home to all those plain and dull women that no man cares to make a home for; it shows that they also have their place. I often think that people are mistaken in being so set against nunneries, because nunneries give a reason somehow for the lives of lots of single women, whom there doesn't seem to be room for anywhere else."

"There's always room for them that can fill it, Amelia Tovey," expostulated Mrs. Peppercorn, "without bringing any nunneries into the matter at all. And as for the women with no sense—well, I can't see that either God or man would be much the better for their company."

"I always disapproved of that young Forrester and his monastery notions," said Miss Skinner; "religious superstition is a canker in the heart of any community. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Sprott, that monasteries and convents and the like are sinks of iniquity and hot-beds of wickedness?"

But Mrs. Sprott was suspended, so to speak, after the fashion of Mohammed's coffin, between the heaven of Claude Forrester's presentation of Theophilus to the living of Dinglewood, and the earth of the latter's possible marriage with Dagmar Silverthorne; and consequently she was, for the time being, uncertain as to which side to take. Mrs. Sprott was quite wise enough to speak well of the bridge that had carried her over in the past; but she was also wise enough to speak still better of the bridge that might possibly carry her farther in the future; so that—although still undecided—she was inclining towards the abjuration of her boasted allegiance to Claude and his monastery, and the transference of the same to Dagmar and her orphanage. But she knew that

it is always a mistake to turn one's coat too rapidly; such quick changes in attire are apt to reflect unfavourably upon the character of the wearer; so she thought it best to temporize. "Not Anglican monasteries and convents, Miss Skinner; you are mistaken in applying to the homes of rest and spiritual refreshment patronized by our dear Church of England such terms as are only applicable to the unhallowed institutions of Rome. But there is likewise much to be said in favour of the building of a refuge where the fatherless and the orphan may find a home. For my part, I do not know which is the more deserving charity."

"I wasn't thinking of the charities at all—not one way or another," said Mrs. Peppercorn; "all I said was—and I say it again for all to hear—that the proper person to come into Miss Fallowfield's fortune was Miss Fallowfield's niece."

"Mrs. Forrester's fortune, you mean," murmured Miss Tovey.

"No, Amelia; I said Miss Fallowfield and I meant Miss Fallowfield. I'm not one to take easily to new names. If a woman wants me to call her by her married name, she should begin it when she's young and not when she's close on fifty. I've always thought of Miss Fallowfield as Miss Fallowfield, and I always shall. And I say further that I don't approve of her leaving her money to any charity whatsoever. She ought to have left it to her niece out and out, to my thinking; for I'm one of the old-fashioned sort that believes in leaving one's money to one's own flesh and blood, and letting them spend it as they wish." After which throwing down of the gauntlet Mrs. Peppercorn glared at Mrs. Sprott in open defiance, waiting for that redoubtable foe to pick it up.

And she did not wait in vain. "Oh! Mrs. Peppercorn, how can you say such terrible things? To my mind

there is nothing more beautiful than to give back one's wealth to the God Who gave it to you."

"Certainly, Mrs. Sprott. But there's all the difference in the world between giving and leaving; and if you don't know the difference, I'll be bound the Almighty does. For my part I've no patience with folks who enjoy their money all their lives; and then go and leave it to charity because they can't take it with them. As a matter of fact, they aren't giving away what belongs to them at all; they are giving away what belongs by right to their lawful heirs; and there's no more real charity about them than there is about the man as borrows sixpence in church to give at the collection, and never pays it back again. And if you believe that that sixpence is counted as a jewel in that man's heavenly crown, I can only say as I don't."

"I do not agree with you at all, Mrs. Peppercorn," retorted Mrs. Sprott sternly: "I have the greatest respect for those who leave all their money to charitable objects; and I wish that many more would follow their example."

"And much good it'll do them! Judas left all his money to a charitable object, if I remember rightly; but I never heard as he was any the better for it!" And Mrs. Peppercorn drew herself up with the air of one who feels she has dealt a master-stroke.

"I agree with Mrs. Sprott," cried Miss Skinner; "because I cannot see why all the relations of rich people should benefit by property that they haven't earned. If people want money, let them earn it themselves, instead of expecting it from their rich relations."

"If the Almighty had meant folks to leave their money to monasteries and orphanages, He'd have arranged for them to be born in monasteries and orphanages," persisted Mrs. Peppercorn. "And as He settled them all in their own families it shows that He meant them to leave their

money to their own families. That's as plain as a pike-staff!"

"Well, I haven't any money to leave, so it doesn't matter what I think," little Miss Tovey ventured to remark; "but if I had, I think I would rather leave it to friends who were kind to me than to relations who were not."

But Mrs. Peppercorn stood firm. "Then that only shows what an ill-regulated mind you've got, Amelia Tovey; it's just what I should have expected of you. Blood's thicker than water any day of the week; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for not feeling it."

"Blood may be thicker than water, as you say, Mrs. Peppercorn; but it isn't always as thick as the milk of human kindness." It was Miss Skinner who spoke, and she spoke with some bitterness. She had suffered much and received little at the hands of well-to-do relations.

"Still, as Mrs. Peppercorn remarks," said Mrs. Higginson, "there is much to be said for the claims of kinship. The Fitzwilkins are ever a mutually attached race."

"Well, the Skinners are not," retorted the post-mistress grimly. "I can't abear any of my relations, and never could."

"Ah! how different from me," cried Mrs. Higginson; "I love every member of my house and family, even down to first cousins once removed. But then of course I am well-born." And the daughter of the departed chemist glowed with ancestral pride.

"Are you, indeed!" retorted Mrs. Peppercorn, ever ready to mark what was amiss in her neighbours' walk and conversation. "Then yours is the first instance I ever came across of a person who was well-born mentioning the fact; the very first!"

But Mrs. Higginson's pride of race was all the stronger

for being utterly unfounded, since there are few things more powerful and immovable than the pride of persons who have nothing to be proud of; so she calmly continued: "As dear papa, the Doctor, used so often to say, 'You are what you are, and no man can be anybody but himself.'"

"And a great pity that he can't!" broke in Mrs. Mawer. "It would make married life a sight easier than it is if he could."

"Well," exclaimed the hostess, re-threading her needle and returning to her original subject; "say what you like, you will never convince me that Miss Fallowfield's Will was anything but a sin and a shame. She ought to have left all her money to her niece, with no restrictions or conditions whatsoever. If she wanted to build convents or orphanages, why couldn't she do it in her lifetime; and then leave her niece to do what she liked with the money when her own time came? But what could you expect of a single woman?"

"She wasn't single, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear," pleaded the gentle Amelia: "she was married."

"Amelia Tovey, don't interrupt; I always thought of Miss Fallowfield as a single woman and I always shall." There was something superb in Mrs. Peppercorn's contempt for facts, when they interfered with her own preconceived opinions. "But folks nearly always come to grief over their Wills. If you want to think well of them as is gone, read their biographies in the local papers, but never read their Wills. That's my advice, and it's worth taking."

"Well, I thought it so beautiful of Mrs. Forrester to want to leave all her money to charity," argued the little dressmaker.

"Quite right, Miss Tovey," said Mrs. Sprott with marked approval. "Your opinions do you infinite credit.

I totally disagree with Mrs. Peppercorn in her idea that, with regard to testamentary intentions, our duty to our neighbours comes before our duty to God."

"I didn't say our neighbours—I said our relations," retorted Mrs. Peppercorn; "and what I said I stick to. I consider that your Will should be like your family Bible—no names written in save members of your own family. And if you think that Providence will be taken in by your neglecting your own flesh and blood, and then trying to square it with Him by leaving your money to charity, I can only say again as I think you're mistaken. I had a great-aunt who did that; left quite a nice little fortune to some charity or other, while some of her own relations were almost starving. But I feel sure she has been properly punished by this time—as indeed she deserved."

"I don't believe in future punishment," objected the free-thinking Miss Skinner.

"Don't you? You didn't know my great-aunt!" Mrs. Peppercorn, though no theologian, had grasped the fact that Somerset House in itself is a standing argument in favour of Purgatory. "Oh! she was a most trying old woman all round. Her idea of making herself agreeable was to tell folks she'd left them something in her Will; and after that of course they were as pleasant to her as Punch for fear she should alter it."

"It was very untruthful of her," remarked Miss Skinner.

"Very; but my great-aunt wasn't the sort of woman to be hampered by the truth, bless you! Not she! But she was paid out in the end."

"And how was that done, Mrs. Peppercorn, dear?"

"Well, Amelia Tovey, it was in this way. She felt a great interest in her own funeral, and was always getting things ready for it; and when you went to see her just friendly-like, if she was in a good temper she'd bring her

shroud out and show it to you, all beautifully hand-made, and as neat as nip ; and she always kept it most carefully aired, as she was a great fidget about wearing damp clothes."

Here Mrs. Mawer interrupted the speaker with a prodigious sigh. "It's no good bein' careful—no good whatsoever. If your time has come, you'll catch your death, even though you stay in bed all day, and wear clothes as have been aired to a cinder. And the stouter and stronger you are the less chance you'll have, the world bein' full o' sorra, and stout figures the first to go ! And I'll be bound your great-aunt was nipped in the bud at the appointed time, Mrs. Peppercorn, and passed away all the sooner for resemblin' you in figure."

"She didn't resemble me in figure as it happened, Mrs. Mawer ; she was as skinny a piece of goods as yourself : and there wasn't much nipping in the bud as far as she was concerned, considering she lived to be ninety-two. But in her last years she set her heart on having the most beautiful grave in Mershire, and she bought for herself the choicest spot in Merchester cemetery accordingly. And then—would you believe it ?—the mayor of Merchester lost his wife, and set up a most beautiful monument to her in the next plot to my great-aunt's ; and aunt was that put out about it as never was, and wrote a long letter to him on the subject, saying as how his wife's monument had completely spoiled her view. And so it had : there was no doubt on that question. The mayor plainly refused to transplant his wife at any cost, in spite of all that aunt said. But it was the death of her. She never got over it, but died the following autumn, no longer having her pride and interest in her grave to keep her alive."

A thrill of pity pulsated through the company. This was a sorrow they could understand.

"I was sorry for her myself at the time," admitted the

great-niece of the injured one, "until I read her Will; and then I wished as the whole Town Council had planted their wives round her in rows, like celery."

"I think it is time to begin the reading aloud," said Mrs. Sprott, drawing the biography of the Prayer-Book out of her reticule. "The Vicar does not approve of our wasting the precious time of the sewing-parties upon idle gossip."

Mrs. Peppercorn's eyes flashed. It always riled her when Mrs. Sprott referred to her offspring as "the Vicar." "Well, I don't see what concern it is of his, and it's no use pretending that I do. For my part I don't approve of parsons interfering with the daily lives of their parishioners: it is too Popish for my taste."

"Surely, Mrs. Peppercorn, you must admit that it is the duty of a pastor to guide and admonish his flock?"

"Well, Mrs. Sprott, if you are a Roman Catholic, wanting to have the priest popping in and out of your house at all hours of the day and poking his finger into every pie, you are, and that's the end of it. You've a right to choose your own religion and to abide by it. But I'm a good sound Protestant; and a good sound Protestant I mean to remain."

This was—as it was meant to be—more than the Anglican soul of Mrs. Sprott could bear. "You have no right to accuse me of being a Roman Catholic, Mrs. Peppercorn: no right at all."

"Then you shouldn't behave like one. But perhaps you are more of a Jew, which is a very interfering sort of religion also. I remember once going with Peppercorn to see some Jewish friends of his, and it was the Feast of Tabernacles and they were having their dinner in a tent in the garden. And I said to Peppercorn, 'Peppercorn,' says I, 'how thankful we ought to be that we belong to a religion that doesn't interfere with our daily life!' Pepper-

corn burst out laughing at that, though what there was to laugh at I didn't see then and never shall. But there's nothing stranger than the queer things that men and children laugh at; things that sensible folks can see no joke in at all, and which aren't funny and were never meant to be."

Here, however, Mrs. Sprott thought fit to introduce the closure by opening her book and beginning to read.

But though Dinglewood might rejoice at the substitution of the orphanage for the monastery, the change did not bring the delight to Dagmar that she expected. Womanlike she not only wanted to have her own way; she also wanted the man she loved to approve it as the best way possible. And this was of course out of the question. Claude could never love the orphanage for Dagmar's sake: he would more probably dislike Dagmar for the sake of the orphanage. Men have been known not infrequently to sacrifice their principles on the altar of love; but rarely, if ever, their prejudices. As a rule they care more about things than women do; while women care more about people. Therefore the orphanage was not, and never could be, as much to Dagmar as the monastery had been to Claude; and she was not absorbed in the building as he had been. Moreover the fact that he was not in harmony with her hurt her sorely. She did not at all realize what she had taken from him when she stopped the erection of the monastery; and so she could not understand how deeply he felt and resented her action.

But although she did not see how matters stood, Octavius Rainbrow saw; and, seeing, understood.

A great change had come over the character of Octavius since the shipwreck. It is always a stupendous moment in any man's life when he realizes that he falls

short of absolute perfection ; and this moment had come to Rainbrow when he sprang into the boat and knew himself for a coward. He still loved Dagmar—loved her more than he had ever done before ; but he did not again ask her to marry him, as he felt himself unworthy of her ; and he also saw that she was in love with Claude Forrester.

He saw even further than this, for underneath his many fopperies and affectations Octavius possessed a spark of the true dramatic instinct which has the power of putting itself into another's place—an instinct in which Claude was signally lacking. It is a great gift, this capacity of looking at happiness, and at other things, through another man's eyes—a gift which turns by its alchemy into true sympathy the ordinary emotions of pity and admiration. It is also a gift without which but little success can be attained in the field of literature, for it will not be of much use to the literary aspirant to study human nature as a doctor studies a disease. He must go deeper than that. He must not only diagnose the pain—he must experience its sensations ; he must not only prescribe the relief—he must rejoice in the thrill of it.

Rainbrow bid fair to attain success in his own profession of letters through his exercise of this dramatic quality; and it also enabled him to understand to some extent Claude's attitude of mind towards Dagmar Silverthorne.

Claude was not in love with the girl, though he had been very near it. But she was now associated in his mind with disappointment and misery, and he shrank from her accordingly. Have we not all felt stirrings of most unjust yet very real dislike towards people in whose society we underwent the tortures of toothache ? It was not their fault that our tooth ached, they were not even conscious of it, yet in our own minds they are

associated with our anguish ; and for years afterwards they seem to us to be redolent of misery. And it is the same with bitterer pains than mere physical ones. We are not as a rule very fond of persons with whom we were only brought into contact in seasons of sorrow and trouble ; we have nothing actually against them, but we shrink from their society because it brings back to us the unhappy past ; that is to say, of course, unless there is something in their own personality or in our former relations with them which is stronger than our mental association between them and our trouble. And Claude shrank from Dagmar, not because she had ousted him by coming into her aunt's fortune ; his feeling was more subtle and less ignoble than that ; he rather avoided her unconsciously because she reminded him of his bitter disappointment, and so was part and parcel of it in his own mind.

This Octavius saw ; and he also saw that Dagmar was incapable of seeing it unless it was pointed out to her very plainly indeed. She naturally imagined that Claude's coolness towards her arose from the fact that she had supplanted him as the inheritor of Mrs. Forrester's fortune ; and she resented it accordingly.

So Rainbrow took it upon himself—an act of unselfishness which would have been impossible to him prior to the shipwreck—to set matters straight if he could between the two rivals ; and he accordingly spoke to Dagmar upon the subject.

"I consider that Forrester is looking very ill," he began diplomatically ; "very ill indeed. He has the appearance of a man whose faith is blighted and whose hopes are blasted. Surely you must have noticed the change in him, as you and he see a great deal of each other, do you not ?"

Dagmar fell into the trap at once. "No, we don't see a great deal of each other now, Mr. Rainbrow ; you are

quite out of it there. I never see anything of Claude now ; and when I do, he hardly speaks to me, and never makes himself at all nice."

"That is strange, as you two used to be such great friends once."

Dagmar sighed. "I know we used. We used to quarrel with each other at least three times a day, and generally oftener ; and now Claude wouldn't quarrel with me if the peace of Europe depended on it. He is always so dreadfully polite and friendly with me now, and that in itself proves that he regards me as an enemy."

"That is a bad sign, I admit. When faithful friends cease to fall out there is no renewing of love. Strife is the stimulant of affection."

"It isn't as if he had never quarrelled with me," Dagmar continued mournfully : "in that case I should have no right to complain when he left off; but we used to have such lovely heated arguments over things that didn't matter in the least, and get so frightfully bitter and excited about them. Now he doesn't care an atom what I think about anything. Why, when I differed from him the other day, he even went so far as to admit that there were two sides to every question ; and when a man admits that to a woman who doesn't agree with him, it shows how utterly indifferent to her he is."

It was not perhaps exactly dignified of Dagmar to confide her woes to Octavius in this fashion ; but dignity was not, and never would be, one of Miss Silverthorne's distinguishing characteristics. Hers was a nature that could not exist without a confidante of some kind ; she must talk, and talk about herself ; and somebody—it did not much matter who—must listen. Miss Perkins—though a most admirable woman in many ways—was not the stuff whereof young girls' confidantes are made ; she was too

practical, too sensible, too prone to see things as they really were and in their true proportion. The mind of youth is like a stained-glass window, in that it is utterly independent of the rules of perspective; and persons with a strong sense of perspective do not recommend themselves to the young. Such persons generally give the advice that is wise and reasonable, and that is never the advice that is acceptable to the receiver.

Octavius nodded his head thoughtfully. "Yes; there is a great deal in what you say. The first symptoms of a man's interest in a woman is an uncontrollable desire to mould her opinions upon his. It would be real agony to me if any woman for whom I felt a *tendresse* openly declared that she preferred Mendelssohn to Wagner; it would give me shakes and shudderings all down my spine."

"I don't believe that anything I could say now would even touch Claude Forrester's spine, much less make it shake and shudder. He was quite polite to me the other day when I said that I considered Luther a greater man than Thomas-à-Becket; I only said it just to try him, as neither Luther nor Thomas-à-Becket was ever anything to me; and yet a year ago he nearly snapped my head ofl because I expressed an opinion that the Sarum Use was more becoming than the Roman one, although I really didn't know the difference between the two."

Octavius understood and sympathized. "But that is bad—very bad; because I am sure that in the depths of his heart Forrester cherishes the deepest antipathy towards Luther."

"Of course he does; that is what made it so upsetting! Luther is just the sort of man that Claude couldn't stand at any price, and I know he'd be furious if anybody he really liked stuck up for Luther. But he doesn't care what I do. I don't believe he'd turn a hair if I even went

so far as to make an idol of Calvin. He is as indifferent to me as that!"

"I wonder what has caused this fundamental change in Forrester's feelings towards an erstwhile friend."

"I can tell you: it is just envy and jealousy. He has been nasty to me ever since you found out that Mr. Forrester was drowned before Aunt Charlotte, and that therefore Aunt Charlotte's money ought to come to me. And I think it is rather horrid of him to put money before everything in that way. I wasn't a bit nasty to him when he had all Aunt Charlotte's money; so I don't see why he should be to me! But I've often noticed that people are never so nice to other people as other people are to them, which rather puts one off being nice altogether. Just as unselfishness is a very good game for two to play at; but it is dreadfully unsatisfactory if only one of the two is unselfish, and that one happens to be you!"

And then Octavius did the thing which was accounted one of the chiefest glories of the Psalmist's ideal gentleman: he did his duty to his neighbour and disappointed him not, though it was to his own hindrance. "There I think you do Forrester an injustice," he said; "a great and grave injustice. He cares no more for the money itself than you do, and he is far too just and judicial a man to grudge his friends what is theirs by right. But what he resents is that you have come between him and what he considered his divinely appointed mission. He is not angry with you for having received an earthly fortune; he is angry with you for having refused, as he thinks, a heavenly crown."

Dagmar gave a little gasp. "Oh! it never occurred to me in that light. But surely an orphanage is as worthy of a heavenly crown as a monastery is."

"Forrester does not think so; and as a man believes things to be, so to that man they are."

"And of course the orphanage-crown would be *mine*

and not *his*," added Dagmar, with a touch of Mercian shrewdness.

"I do not believe that consideration affects him at all. There is nothing small about Forrester; but there is something extremely narrow. As long as service is rendered to the God Whom he worships, he does not mind who offers it—either himself or another; but he minds very much indeed how it is offered, and whether it is done in a way which he himself has decreed is acceptable."

Dagmar did not speak, but she felt more drawn to Octavius than she had ever been before. It is always a comfort to generous natures, when they are wroth with one they love, to discover that it is they themselves who are in fault and not the loved one—a discovery which is fraught with extreme discomfort in the case of natures that are not generous.

"Forrester has no personal animosity towards you, Miss Silverthorne," Rainbrow continued; "I am quite sure of that. But he imagines that in this matter you are hampering the designs and hindering the work of the Almighty, and so are God's enemy rather than his. Mind, I am not saying he is right; I consider that he is utterly wrong; from my own point of view an orphanage is a far more truly charitable institution than is a monastery. But this is what Forrester thinks, and we must measure a man's conduct by a man's standard. His attitude towards you is that of the priest towards the heretic—of the Christian martyr towards the pagan persecutor."

"Well, I never! To think of me as a pagan persecutor, and I go to Church three times every Sunday, and never hurt a fly in my life!"

"I do not say that Forrester is not a fool, Miss Silverthorne: I only say that he is a fanatic."

But at this Dagmar fired up. "Oh! he isn't at all a fool, Mr. Rainbrow; he is a most awfully clever man."

"A man may be extremely clever and yet an arrant fool. The clever fools are the most dangerous ones."

"But Claude isn't anything of the kind," retorted Dagmar ambiguously ; "and I won't let anybody say that he is. But I'm glad you think that what I am blaming in him isn't badness after all, but an excess of goodness ; it makes all the difference, you see."

"I suppose it does, though the results are pretty much the same. Torquemada was a finer character than Palmer the poisoner ; but I doubt if this moral superiority made much difference to their respective victims.'

CHAPTER XIX

RESTITUTION

RAINBROW'S remarks made a great impression upon Dagmar. She firmly believed that a man can understand another man better than any woman could understand him—a delusion which is shared equally by both sexes with regard to the other, and which leads to many mistakes and misunderstandings. It is when a man accepts his mother or his sister's translation of his wife in place of his own unaided reading of her, and when a wife is guided by her father or brother's rendering of the difficult passages in her husband's character rather than by her own instincts in the matter, that domestic troubles begin. Yet it is a natural and pardonable mistake, and one that has its root in the virtue of humility: and now and then it is not a mistake at all, but a sensible way of getting at the truth. This happened to be one of those exceptional cases.

Unlike Claude, Dagmar was not at all bigoted in her opinions: she possessed that quality—generally admirable, but occasionally dangerous—known as "an open mind." In this she showed traces of her Mercian origin; for the inhabitants of the Midlands, the dwellers by the great highways, are as a rule far more ready to receive new impressions, and to give proper weight to the same, than are those of their fellows whose lot is cast on the summits of the hills and by the edges of the sea. The shores and the mountains must ever have a touch of finality about them: they are the ends of the earth as far as their

particular locality is concerned, and have *Finis* inscribed upon them by Nature's pen; and this touch of finality shows itself in the characters of their inhabitants. It is to the sea-shore and to the mountain that we must turn in emergencies for heroes and martyrs and great deliverers; for in order to be any one of these things, a man must believe that the last word has been said and the final decree uttered; must know himself to be absolutely right with regard to his own particular branch of the truth. We must lift our eyes to the hills if we need immediate help in present trouble—we must stretch our hands out seawards if we crave for heroic deliverers from pressing doubt and pain; but if, instead of these, we want the calm sense and the logical reasonableness of the man of science—the open-minded wisdom and the practical knowledge of the business man and the man of affairs—then we shall do well to seek for these among the lowlying uplands and the shallow valleys of the Midlands, across the plains of which run the wide white roads that carry the commerce of the world. For there is no air of finality about the denizen of the great plains of the *Via Media*: like Ophelia, he knows what he is, but he knows not what he may be: compromise is as the breath of his nostrils, and he has learnt that there is no such thing as the last word. Therefore he is kindly and reasonable; slow to condemn any man as utterly wrong, since he is aware that no man is absolutely right; and quick to hear the latest evidence on any question, and to sift it for himself. In moments of stress and emergency he is not perhaps so present a help as is the man of unalterable convictions and implacable certainties; but he is a much safer guide than the latter in the uneventful hours which make up by far the greater part of everyday life.

Therefore Dagmar did not forget to be reasonable; and the possibility of changing her mind was never entirely

expunged from her list of alternatives. She gave Rainbrow's words full and long consideration; and finally came to the conclusion that she had been guilty of injustice in her judgment of Claude. She even went so far as to commend him in her own mind for his treatment of her, since he believed that she had—however unwittingly—thwarted the work of God in the parish of Dinglewood. Which shows that for a woman Dagmar was wonderfully reasonable.

But how were matters to be put straight again? That was the next question, and it was not an easy question to answer.

Then the commercial instinct—which is a very good instinct in its way—awoke in her soul, and bade her consider two things—namely, first what she wanted, and secondly what she was prepared to pay for it. It is the fashion nowadays to sneer at the commercial instinct, and to despise it as something common and vulgar; but in reality it is nothing of the sort. The essence of vulgarity is the concealment of vulgarity. The common man who knows that he is common, ceases to be common by this knowledge: by realizing that he is not a gentleman, he almost becomes one. The really vulgar people are the people who are for ever pretending that they are not vulgar; the truly ill-bred are those who are constantly parading their gentility. There is nothing that is vulgar in itself: it only becomes vulgar when it pretends to be something else. Therefore the commercial instinct is never a common instinct except when it sets itself up as not being commercial at all. Do we not all know men and women who positively swell with pride as they say, "I am a very poor business man or woman: I really know nothing at all about business"? This is probably true, but where is the healing virtue in their incapacity? The man who built a tower without counting the cost very likely prided

himself, as they do, upon being a poor man of business; but he discovered his mistake when he was pointed out by Divine Scorn as an almost incredible instance of human folly.

Now Dagmar had the sense to know that you cannot get anything in this world without paying for it; the account may stand over, it is true, but the bill will always be sent in in the end; so she communed with her own soul as to how much she wanted Claude's friendship, and how much she was prepared to give for so desirable a boon. Which did she care for most—Claude or the orphanage? That was the question put into a nutshell, for the orphanage seemed to be the price quoted for the friendship of Claude. And quick as thought the answer came—*Claude*. But what was the next thing to be done?

She could not give the fortune back to him. It was out of her power to do so, even had she wished it; and, besides, he was far too proud ever to submit to such a thing. She wanted to go to him and say, "Here is the money; go and build as many monasteries as you like, as long as you will be friends with me." But that, too, would never do; he would not accept money from her, even for his cherished scheme. With her usual common sense, Dagmar had realized that she could not have both the orphanage and Claude's approval; and that she must therefore make up her mind which of the two she most desired, and sacrifice the other to that. But having decided that the orphanage was the price to pay, and that Claude's friendship was worth it, she was not quite clear as to how the bargain was to be transacted. She was one of the rare women who know that they cannot both eat their cake and have it; most of her sex go through life expecting to achieve this duplex action, and are grievously disappointed at their failure. But she could not for the moment see how the cake in question was to be

properly preserved ; and it is the worst disappointment of all to forego the eating of the cake, and then to find that it has gone mouldy and has to be thrown away.

For several days Dagmar pondered over this perplexity. It was now autumn again, and her musings were tinged with the sadness of the season ; for the lions in one's path always loom larger in the haze of autumn than they appear in the clear sunshine of spring. But at last the light came.

She could not give her aunt's fortune back to Claude ; she could not even bid him build his monastery at her expense ; but she could build the monastery herself, and pretend that she was indulging her own inclination in so doing.

Here Dagmar touched the high-water mark of feminine unselfishness. It is comparatively easy and extremely frequent for a woman to sacrifice her own inclinations to those of the man she loves ; but unselfishness almost rises to the height of genius when she not only does his way, but pretends that it is her own. Unselfishness dressed in the robe of martyrdom is an admirable but by no means an unusual sight ; but unselfishness purposely disguised as selfishness, is a rare and beautiful vision before which even the angels veil their faces in reverence and awe. Then the sacrifice is consummated without the vestments of the martyr or the ritual of self-denial, and is accompanied by no incense of approval and no music of applause. Even the one on whose behalf it is offered is unconscious and therefore ungrateful ; and only the God Who seeth in secret knows exactly the price of the hidden box of precious spikenard invisibly poured forth.

It did not take Dagmar long to make up her mind when once her mind devoted itself to its own making up ; nor—having once made it up—to act upon the result ; so it was not many days after Rainbrow's revelation, that

she set out to speak to Claude and to convey to him her decision.

As usual, she found him hovering over the slowly-growing orphanage, and superintending the workmen as was his wont. And she noticed with a pang—which went straight to that mother-heart of her which is concealed in the breast of all good women—how sad and worn and broken he looked. There was a strong maternal instinct in Dagmar's love for Claude; perhaps that was the reason why her love was so unchangeable by anything that he might do or say; for when a woman adores a man for his supposed perfections, there is always the risk of her discovering his feet of clay and loving him the less in consequence. But when there is that maternal strain in her affection which makes her love him for what he is, and not for what she supposed him to be—when she sees his faults as his mother sees them, and loves him the more rather than the less in consequence—then nothing can ever estrange her from him any more than it could estrange his mother.

It is rather the fashion among romantic and sentimental people to exalt a woman's feeling for her husband on the reverent rather than the indulgent side; to place the ideal wife in the adoring and worshipful rather than the tender and helpful attitude; but let it be borne in mind that the first female name invoked in our Marriage Service as a pattern to "this woman" in the performance and keeping of her new vow and covenant, is not the name of the gentle Sarah, who mildly obeyed her husband, calling him lord; but of the capable Rebecca, on whose far-seeing shrewdness her husband always leaned, and who was strong enough to comfort him after his mother's death. The name of Sarah comes later: "this woman" must likewise learn to obey and to be in subjection; but she must first be ready to stand as a

support to her husband in his weaker moments, and as a helpmeet for him when he finds the battle of life too hard to fight alone. The humble and adoring wife is at heart a selfish woman who will not take her share of the burden, but leaves her husband to bear it by himself, making up in slavish adoration what she lacks in sense and efficiency. And man—who is a man after all and not a demigod—wants help and comfort and practical good sense far more than he wants worship and adulation and feeble humility; while woman is called upon to love and to cherish rather than to worship and adore. She is bound to serve and to obey, it is true; but service and obedience are practical words, and have no connection with the blind and unreasoning devotion which the sentimentalist considers is the duty of the married woman to her lord.

As Dagmar came nearer to him, Claude looked up and saw her, but his smile of greeting was superficial and had no real welcome in it. His heart was very sore just then. As the walls rose and the general design of the building began to take form, he felt more and more that it was a defamation to degrade this fair temple to humble and domestic uses; it was like serving bread and cheese upon a patine of bright gold, or drinking small beer out of a chalice of agate.

"Claude, I want to speak to you very particularly," Dagmar began, "about something that is most frightfully important."

"I am entirely at your service." Claude spoke with that ominous politeness which Octavius and Dagmar had agreed was such a bad sign. "If you have any further instructions to give as to the building of your orphanage, I will do my best to see that they are carried out."

"Well, the fact is," replied Dagmar, as they slowly strolled up the valley together, "I have come to the con-

clusion that the idea of the orphanage is altogether a mistake."

"A mistake? Your beloved orphanage?" Claude spoke as one bewildered.

"Yes; altogether a mistake. You see, everybody is wrong some time or another—even me. And I have been wrong about the orphanage, though I'm not often. And I'm sure that the wisest thing to do, when one has done a foolish thing, is not to do it. It is silly and obstinate to go on doing a thing for the sole reason that one has begun to do it, don't you think?"

Claude still looked puzzled. The mutability of the feminine mind was past all bearing with, he decided; he had no patience with it. But he still spoke courteously. "Of course, if one is convinced that one has made a mistake, it is much more dignified to own that one has done so and to endeavour to retrace one's steps, than to continue to pursue a foolish course rather than admit oneself to be in the wrong."

"Well, that is just like me. After thinking it well over, I have come to the conclusion that the orphanage idea—though very fetching and attractive—is really not practicable. I believe it would pauperize people; and it is no good making people poorer than they need be by treating them as if they were poorer than they are."

"Certainly not. There is a great danger of pauperizing in all promiscuous charities."

"And then," Dagmar continued, "it is absurd to blind one's eyes to the fact that the building you have designed is far too beautiful to be turned into a nursery or a schoolroom. There should be suitability in all things; and no one can pretend that the courts of a temple make a suitable playground for infants."

"Nevertheless," argued Claude, who always endeavoured—and generally in vain—to see both sides of a

question, "beautiful surroundings are an important factor in the education of young children."

"But not this particular kind of beauty, don't you see? Real beauty is too big for children; they can only understand prettiness. It would be no real kindness to children to hang priceless Turners and Botticellis on the walls of their nursery; they much prefer a pretty and bright-coloured wall-paper, illustrated with scenes from nursery rhymes."

"But there is no necessity for the orphanage to be so very beautiful from the artistic point of view," replied Claude, still arguing against himself in his frantic efforts after abstract justice.

"There wasn't in the first instance before the building was begun; but there is now. It is always so ridiculous to discuss things that are half finished as if they were things that had not yet been ordered. There are lots of reasons which could justify a woman in refusing to marry a man, but which wouldn't justify her at all in running away from him after she was married. Just as I have a perfect right not to order boiled mutton for lunch; but no right to order it, and then throw it out of the window because I consider boiled mutton unfit for human food. You can't deal with what is, as if it was what isn't; and it is a waste of time to try to do so. You see we have got to deal with the building as it is and not as it would have been if it had never been begun; and there is no use denying that it will be the most unorphanagey orphanage you ever saw." After which lengthy speech Dagmar stopped for sheer want of breath.

"Then what do you propose to do? I don't quite understand," asked Claude.

"What I propose to do (if you will let me, that is to say, and don't consider the idea copyright) is to carry out your original idea, and to continue the monastery on the

lines you started. I'm sure it is the right thing to do, and the best use that could be made of Aunt Charlotte's money."

Claude's face lighted up as it had not lighted up for months. "Do you really mean that?"

"Yes, I do: I see now that you were right and I was wrong," replied Dagmar, thereby proving herself an adept in the arts by which the sons of men are managed.

Claude fully agreed with her on this point. What man would not have done so? "I think that is true. Not that your idea of the orphanage wasn't all right, because it was; but it was quite ordinary and commonplace, while the erection of a sort of clergy-house and theological college combined, as I suggested, will be a much rarer form of charity, and one of which the Church is in more special need. But wouldn't you rather found an institution for women-workers?" he added generously, "because you are so fond of women."

Dagmar shook her head. "No: I don't think a monastery for women would be as really useful as a convent for men; because though the monastery part of it would be just as good, the theological part of it would be of no use. And that's really the part that matters."

Claude looked down on her, his face aglow with joy and admiration. "I say, Dagmar, it's really splendid of you!" he cried; "and it seems much more splendid somehow done by you than by me. Don't you see that in the years to come the fact that a woman raised this house of rest for weary souls will make it far more restful to them than if one of their fellow-men had done it? It will give it just that feminine touch which turns a house into a home—that mother-comfort the longing for which led the Church into the error of Mariolatry. All down the ages men will bless your name, and will honour your

memory as they honour the memory of the mothers who hushed them to rest when they were little children."

And as Dagmar looked up into Claude's eyes and read the happiness and approval written there, she realized that Octavius was right when he said that there was no personal ambition—not even a spiritual one—mixed up with Claude's passionate desire for the furtherance of the work of God; and she also realized—though as yet dimly—that to certain natures the ideal of womanhood is embodied in the ideal of the mother. Such men do not worship woman as the wife, nor cherish her as the friend and comrade: they need comfort rather than companionship, and crave less for passion than for peace. Perhaps they are not so virile as the other sort; but they are quite as human and as worthy to be loved.

Of such are Claude Forrester and his kind in modern days—of such, in the Middle Ages, were those holy men who forswore the love of wife and child and the happiness of the home that they might devote themselves to the service of the Mother of God; and of such, in the morning of the world, was that gentle and tender-hearted patriarch who leaned upon the strength and foresight of the shrewd and competent Rebecca, and loved her, and was comforted after his mother's death.

CHAPTER XX

CONCERNING MISS TOVEY

WHILE the monastery was rapidly growing to perfection, and Claude was absorbed in it, and Dagmar was absorbed in him, the villagers of Dinglewood went on their way, playing their allotted parts in the tragic comedy we call life. There are other things in the world besides love and ambition, though the young are loth to believe it; and it is not always the youthful and beautiful heroine who occupies the middle of the stage. Now and then—much to her surprise if she is conscious of it—she has to make way for other and less romantic performers. And so it happened in Dinglewood at this time.

"I don't feel comfortable in my mind with regard to Amelia Tovey," remarked Mrs. Peppercorn, as she stood one morning in the village post-office, having chanced upon Mrs. Mawer there, and being always ready—not to say eager—for social intercourse with her neighbours. "There's something very wrong with Amelia."

"I daresay you are right, there is with all of us if we only knew it," Mrs. Mawer replied; "but our eyes are blinded till it is too late for anythink to do us any good any more. And the stronger and stouter we look and the better we feel, the more likely there is to be a canker at the root, the world bein' what it is, and sorra and sufferin' the lot of all."

"I wasn't referring to Amelia's body, Mrs. Mawer: I was thinking about her mind."

"Which, by the same token, Mrs. Peppercorn, insanity is that much on the increase—owin' to telegraphs and telephones and motor-cars and the like, and no one stoppin' in the same place for long enough to take root and settle down—that the lunatic asylums are full to overflowin', out-door relief bein' no use when the patients become dangerous. And often they're taken violent so sudden that you're murdered while you are talkin' to 'em, and before you've time to call in a doctor or even a policeman, life bein' so uncertain, and nobody knowin' what an hour may bring forth."

"Some folks have further to go to go out of their minds than others," remarked Mrs. Peppercorn severely; "some have only got just to step over the way."

"Which is no protection nor safeguard whatsoever," retorted Mrs. Mawer with one of her profoundest sighs: "the brightest intellecks bein' the first to give way. It is the sensible folks with no nonsense about 'em—such as yourself and Farmer Peppercorn for instance—that go mad soonest through there bein' more strain on their intellecks, and sorra bein' the end of all things and this world a wilderness o' care."

"Well, all I can say is," interjected the post-mistress, "that if only hard-worked intellects are the ones to give way, then Amelia Tovey is clear of the lunatic asylum for some years to come."

"It is not that I consider Amelia Tovey is going daft or anything of that kind," explained Mrs. Peppercorn: "the poor thing is as sane as any single woman can expect to be who hasn't had some common sense knocked into her by married life; but she has gone in for some new-fangled religion or other; and I'm one that can't abide new-fangled religions. New potatoes, new flannel, and new-laid eggs for me; but no new religions if you please! The old sort of religion is good enough for

me; and if folks act up to it properly, it'll take them all their time, and keep their hands as full as they want."

"Yet we must march with the times, Mrs. Peppercorn," Miss Skinner objected.

"Then be careful where you are marching to, Emma Skinner. As far as my experience goes, marching with the times means marching down-hill."

"And we must keep pace with modern thought."

"Easy enough to keep the pace up when you are going down-hill, Emma Skinner. You don't want an extra engine put on to the train for that."

"And religious mania is the worst mania of all," Mrs. Mawer continued, as if nobody had spoken since her last remark, "and the most difficult to cure, and the most likely to lead to murder and suicide. But that's always the way in the autumn; troubles are bound to come then, if they don't come all the year round. The moment the days begin to close in, I always says to myself, 'I wonder what dreadful thing will happen before they begin to lengthen again.' And I never can tell what it will be, the future bein' so doubtful from day to day, and trouble fallin' upon us all alike as the sparks fly upward, with nothink certain but the grave."

"Well, for my part, I don't see if trouble is given to us all alike, why riches shouldn't be given to us all alike also," remarked Miss Skinner. "I'm one to think out things for myself, and judge accordingly."

"Which accounts for some of the things you do think, Emma Skinner," Mrs. Peppercorn interrupted: "for no one else would waste their time in thinking such nonsense. When folks tell me they form their own opinions, I just say, 'So I should have supposed,' the same as I say when they tell me they make their own dresses. You've only to look at them and listen to them for half a minute

to know where that rubbish comes from, and that it's all home-made."

"I wonder as you don't say a word to Miss Tovey yourself, Mrs. Peppercorn," suggested Mrs. Mawer; "it may not yet be too late for a word in season, and Miss Tovey not so young as she was; and considerin' that as the tree falleth there it must lie."

"Well, I should have done so, Mrs. Mawer; and I may yet; but the fact is that I've been that set against interfering with my neighbours through seeing Mrs. Sprott do it, that I doubt if I could mention it if I saw an earthquake in your back-yard and you not aware of it. There's nothing so cures you of a fault as seeing somebody with it that you can't abear. I'm sure there's nothing I wouldn't do, and no fault I wouldn't cure myself of, if I thought that I should be less like Mrs. Sprott in consequence. Ever since I heard her interfere with Mrs. Paicey about giving the baby Mellin's Food, I've made up my mind never to pass a remark on what I see other folks' children eating—no, not if I caught them filling their poor little stomachs with pea-shucks and acorns. Anything is better than interfering with what don't concern you; that savours too much of Mrs. Sprott for my taste, and I wouldn't lend a hand to it, no, not if you was to crown me."

After delivering which sentiment of *laissez faire*, Mrs. Peppercorn picked up her parcels and marched out of the village shop.

But although these good ladies were so generous with their pity for the little dressmaker, the object of their compassion was in no need of it. For a wonderful thing had happened to Miss Tovey. A great change had come over the spirit of her dream—a complete revolution had turned her world upside down. For her there was a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness dwelt; and the

former limitations of her existence were not remembered, neither did they come into mind. She had heard the great trumpet-cry which awakens all souls sooner or later, the cry, "Behold, I make all things new"; and for her the former things—the pain and the sorrow and the crying—had already passed away.

The miracle had been wrought in this wise.

In August Miss Tovey had taken her annual trip to an inexpensive boarding-house at a well-known watering-place on the Welsh coast. She went there for a fortnight every August of her life, to recruit her health for the coming winter, and to spend such of her yearly savings as her rapacious brother and his wife had left intact; and every visit up to now had been equally uneventful. But this year a wonderful thing occurred.

There happened to be staying in the same house as Miss Tovey a Welsh revivalist and his family—the followers and exponents of a new and very small sect who called themselves the "Friends of the Bridegroom." There is no need here to enter into details concerning the dogmas of this sect; suffice it to say that in this—as in all new forms of the Christian religion—there was a foundation of truth, or else it could not have lasted for a day; and there was also a considerable superstructure of error, or else it would have carried the whole world before it. But the power of the "Friends of the Bridegroom" did not lie in the soundness of their creed, which was imperfectly composed and still more imperfectly understood; it lay in the intensity and impetuosity of their faith.

This chance meeting with some members of the sect was an awakening—a revelation—to Amelia Tovey. Amelia had always been a good woman according to her lights; but those lights flickered feebly, for the oil that fed them had run low before ever they were handed on to Amelia by her parents and teachers. She knew much

about religion as a system of conduct ; she knew nothing at all about it as a living force. And Amelia was by nature one of those women in whom the religious instinct was very strong. She would have been terribly shocked if anybody had told her so ; but nevertheless the fact remained that her real vocation was the conventual life—she was a born nun or sister of charity. Therefore this starving of the religious side of her nature was a very serious thing indeed for Amelia Tovey. She was fitted by nature for the cloister—not for the hearth ; but as all her friends and neighbours agreed, as friends and neighbours always do agree, that the hearth was the only possible vocation for a woman, and that women to whom the happiness of the hearth is denied have no place at all in the scheme of creation, Amelia naturally agreed with them ; and believed that the aching void in her life was caused by the fact that no man had loved her and sought her in marriage. But it was nothing of the kind. Amelia was not one of the numerous women who are hungry for the love of man ; she was one of those rarer souls who are hungry for the love of God. Unsuspected by herself, and still more unsuspected by those about her, the little dressmaker was consumed by a longing for fellowship with the Divine, though until now she had not understood what it was that her life so sorely lacked.

Then she fell in with a small party of "Friends of the Bridegroom," and the light came.

These people were ignorant of theology and in many respects mistaken in their teaching ; but to them Christ was a real Person—a known and tried Friend. And herein lay their strength.

For the first time in her life Amelia realized that the Christian religion is no code of conduct founded upon the maxims of a Divine Teacher Who visited this earth some nineteen centuries ago ; but an intimate relationship—a

close union—with an omnipresent, all-sufficing, ever-loving Christ. The blank in her life was filled with His Presence; the empty space in her heart was overflowing with His Love. For her the cold winter of loneliness was past for ever; the rain of tears was over and gone. It was but a little that she had passed from her old companions with their trivial pleasures and their sordid cares; but she had found Him Whom her soul loved; and she held Him, and would not let Him go.

One of the tenets of the "Friends of the Bridegroom" was that the Second Coming was close at hand; that it would be but a very short time before they heard the Bridegroom's Voice and found their joy fulfilled. And this tenet Amelia accepted without doubt or demur, and it flooded her soul with ecstasy. Only a few short months, she said to herself, and she would see Him with these eyes, and fall at His Feet and worship Him, crying "Rabboni"; and the thought made her dizzy with excess of joy.

They had decided—by what strange and ingenious interpretation of prophecy it is not necessary to specify here—that He would come the second time, as He came the first, on Christmas Day; for they were too unlettered to know that the Feast of Christmas is but the season set apart by the Church for her yearly commemoration of the Birth of her Lord; and that the actual date of the Divine Birth in the far-off Syrian stable fell probably some time in the early spring. And they further had arrived at the conclusion that the Christmas Day of the year then in progress was the moment that He had selected for His coming again. This Amelia firmly believed; and the belief brought her the greatest happiness it was possible for a woman to experience.

Through that autumn she lived in a golden dream. "He is coming," she said to herself the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night; and she rejoiced as the

hours slipped by, feeling that each one in its passing brought her nearer to Him. The "Friends of the Bridegroom" shared the old belief that when He comes again He will appear like the dayspring, in the east; and little Miss Tovey used to sit at the window of her tiny bedroom, which looked towards the low, blue hills that lie to the eastward of Merchester, and meditate for hours as to how He would come on the wings of the morning across those very hills to claim her for His own.

Mrs. Peppercorn's word in season was duly uttered, but it fell upon unheeding ears. Amelia's soul was rapt in contemplation of a beatific vision which it had not entered into the heart of Mrs. Peppercorn to conceive; and consequently the little dressmaker was lifted far above the cares and conversation of her neighbours. They might criticize and condemn her, but it mattered not to her. Eyes that have once seen the King in His beauty are henceforward blind to the faults and follies of that humanity which He glorified by taking it upon Himself; ears that have once heard the Shepherd's Voice and known and followed Him, are from that moment deaf to the whispers of carping criticism and petty calumny.

Strange to say, the one person in Dinglewood who really understood and entered into Claude Forrester's monastic idea was the little dressmaker. Dagmar sympathized with the project because it was Claude's; she would have sympathized just as deeply had he desired to erect a cotton-mill or to lay out a Zoological Garden; her heart was with the worker and not in the work. But Miss Tovey—with that perception of the Unseen which is the heritage of certain souls—knew exactly why the young Squire wished to build the monastery, and comprehended all that it meant to him. Although she belonged to a different generation and to a different class, she entered into Claude's feelings as the woman who loved him was

incapable of doing. Comprehension may be synonymous with forgiveness; but it is by no means synonymous with love. Otherwise many of life's tragedies would never be performed.

Frequently did Miss Tovey visit the fair edifice as it increased in size and beauty; and the effect which it produced upon the little dressmaker was exactly the effect for which it had been designed. She found rest and refreshment in contemplating its perfections even in this incomplete and unfinished condition; for she was sufficiently of a mystic to realize how the sacramental principle runs through everything, though she was utterly unconscious of her own mysticism.

Claude was surprised one frosty morning, when he visited as usual the scene of his labours, to find Amelia there before him.

"Good-morning, Miss Tovey," he said in his courteous, even stately, manner; "have you come to see how the building is progressing?"

"Well, not exactly that, sir; but the fact is I often come to look at the monastery when I have a bit of spare time, because it is so very, very beautiful; and somehow its beauty seems to rest me."

Claude's attention was caught at once. The mystical soul is swift to recognize its fellows. "Yes, yes, Miss Tovey; that is just the idea which has inspired me to build it. I want its beauty, quite as much as its use, to be a means of grace to all who are brought into contact with it."

"And I am sure it will be, sir. I hope you don't mind my coming to look at it now and again; it does me so much good."

"Mind? I should just think not! Why, it is the greatest delight to me to find anyone to whom my work appeals as I mean it to appeal."

"Well, I'm sure no one could admire it more than I do," said Miss Tovey; "and I do so love beautiful things. I never can understand how some really good people can think that there is something sinful in beauty, and something pleasing to God in ugliness."

"Neither can I, Miss Tovey."

"And I can never understand either," continued the little dressmaker, delighted to have found someone who did not snub her when she ventured to express her humble opinions, "how people can believe that there is something sinful in happiness, and that God is only pleased with us when we are miserable. Surely the dear Lord came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly; and that cannot mean that we must shut our eyes to all the joy and beauty round us in the world."

"Of course it cannot, Miss Tovey; and I agree with you in your amazement that sane persons can hold such false and pernicious doctrines. But it was the invention of those terrible Puritans, who cast a shadow over the religious life of England which lies upon it to this day." Claude was beginning to enjoy himself immensely.

"I'm sure I don't know who invented it; but it seems a pity for people not to understand that one of God's ways of speaking to His children is by means of beautiful pictures; just as when we were little children our parents showed us picture-books before we had learnt to read, and taught us in that way."

"Exactly," replied the young architect; "and there is more than that. All the beauty that we can see is but an outward symbol of the beauty that we cannot see, and is shown to us for that purpose, so that by means of the one we may in some dim way realize the other."

For the moment Miss Tovey's insignificant features were transfigured by the thoughts which rushed into her mind. "I think I know what you mean, Mr. Claude;

and it even runs through our clothes if we can only see it. That is why I always like people, however poor they may be, to have Sunday clothes ; and then when you put on your nicer things on a Sunday morning it helps you somehow to understand that Sunday is different from other days. And that is the reason why I cannot bear people not to have proper wedding-dresses, but just to be married in an ordinary frock as if it was just an ordinary thing that they were doing. I know I can't express myself properly ; but it seems to me that the white satin and lace and orange-blossom somehow bring more clearly before us the loving and honouring and cherishing, and all the beautiful feelings that a true marriage involves. I know it sounds very foolish ; but I can't help feeling it all the same."

"It is not at all foolish, Miss Tovey ; it is precisely what I feel myself. It is merely an expression of the truth that the sacramental principle permeates everything ; and that even the ordinary events of daily life—the eating and the drinking and the being clothed—become sacraments if rightly understood. And that is the fundamental idea of this monastery—which, unfortunately, people seem sadly slow to understand. I want in some feeble fashion to express, by the visible beauty of the building, the spiritual beauty of the religion of which it is a temple and a shrine. I want the men who live here to feel about it as you feel about the white satin and the orange-blossom at a wedding, that it is a sort of allegory or parable of eternal truth and beauty."

Miss Tovey nodded her acquiescence. "Yes, Mr. Claude, I think I understand. And uniforms and Court dresses are the same in a way, and seem to express war and loyalty as everyday clothes never could do. The helmets of firemen have the same sort of effect, and make one feel quite different from top hats. But

you must excuse me for talking such nonsense, sir; I don't know however I came to do it. Mrs. Peppercorn would say I was quite mad if she heard me."

Claude hastened to assure the little dressmaker of his belief in her sanity. "But, thank Heaven! I'm not Mrs. Peppercorn; and to me you don't seem at all mad, or even foolish."

"It's very kind of you to say so," murmured Miss Tovey humbly.

"I not only don't think you mad; I agree with every word you say," Claude graciously continued. "More than that, I am positively grateful to you for so thoroughly understanding my idea of the monastery. Such sympathy is always very comforting to an artist. Now, Mrs. Peppercorn, for instance, would have no idea what the monastery really means."

"She disapproves of it, as she says it will end in making men Papists or bachelors or both," Miss Tovey replied truthfully.

"Exactly; that is just what she would say; and it shows how utterly beside the mark she is," added Claude, with the fine intolerance of youth. "I'll be bound she understands nothing of the symbolism of marriage either."

"Oh! no, she'd think it silly. But if she doesn't understand marriage, I think she understands men. She is a wonderful wife is Mrs. Peppercorn; I often wonder how it is she seems to know by instinct what men will say or do in any circumstances."

But such proficiency in this branch of knowledge did not commend itself to Claude. "She cannot; because men are so different from each other."

"She says they are all the same at heart, and all require the same sort of treatment."

"Then that just shows how little she knows about the matter," retorted Claude; "think of saying, for instance,

that I require the same sort of treatment as Peppercorn does! I like to be with people who talk to me about art and architecture and symbolism; and he likes to be with people who talk to him about farms and animals and crops. I should prefer a wife who would consider me a firstrate architect; and he would prefer a wife who would consider him a firstrate farmer. Don't you see the enormous difference?"

Of course Miss Tovey did; but Mrs. Peppercorn would have seen no difference at all.

"Well, I must be getting back to my work now, sir," said the little dressmaker; "and thank you so much for speaking so kindly to me, and not minding me coming and looking at your beautiful monastery."

Claude raised his hat. "Nay; rather thank you for so thoroughly understanding and appreciating my work."

Miss Tovey hesitated a moment. "Perhaps I ought to tell you that I believe by the time the monastery is completed our blessed Lord will have come again to reign for ever and ever and to put all things under His Feet."

Claude bowed his head reverently. He was always courteous towards other people's beliefs, even when he did not happen to agree with them; it was only with regard to other people's practices that his tolerance failed. He could feel quite friendly towards a heathen who worshipped another God; but towards a Christian who worshipped the same God after a different fashion from his own he experienced nothing but the rankest animosity. He disagreed with Miss Tovey as to the imminence of the Second Coming; but he agreed with her as to the methods of preparing for the Divine Event; and so all was peace between them.

"Perhaps," continued the little dressmaker timidly, "I ought to think that, with the Millennium so near at hand, it is a waste of time building houses and planting vine-

yards and trying to make the world more beautiful ; but somehow I cannot help believing that it is never a waste of time to make beautiful things, because there is something in beauty which can never pass away ; and that—even after He has come—it is only the wrong and ugly things that will disappear, while the beautiful things will last for ever as a part of God Himself."

Claude interrupted her. "Yes, yes ; I am sure you are right ; for beauty, like truth, is eternal and indestructible."

"And in the same way," Miss Tovey went on, "I think it is only the bad and ugly parts of ourselves that will be changed, while the best parts will live for ever and ever ; so that we shall still be ourselves through all eternity ; our best and truest selves."

"It is only our best and truest selves that are ourselves at all, Miss Tovey. All that is evil has in it the germ of death, and so can never attain immortality. But all that is good and righteous and beautiful is, as you say, a part of God Himself and therefore immortal, and is bound to live on after the evil and the wrong and ugly have for ever passed away. And I believe, with you, that somehow—in some way which we do not understand at present—the beauty of this building will last through all eternity, long after the mere stones of which it is made shall have crumbled into dust."

"Like the loving and the cherishing last for ever, long after the white satin and the orange-blossom are worn out and faded," added Miss Tovey.

With difficulty Claude repressed a smile at the little dressmaker's imagery. "Precisely so. And therefore in a mystical fashion the white satin and the orange-blossom are immortal, because that which they embody and express can never die. You are a thorough sacramentarian, Miss Tovey."

"I don't understand what you mean by such long words, Mr. Claude ; but again I thank you for letting me say what I think, and not thinking me as foolish as people generally do. And I am sure I beg your pardon for taking up so much of your valuable time, but I was so interested I didn't realize it was so late." And the little dressmaker hurried away in much contrition of spirit.

But although the young Squire might understand and enter into Miss Tovey's attitude of mind, there were those who sneered at it, deciding to make use of it for their own selfish ends ; and of such were her brother Thomas and his wife, the former being out of work just then.

It seemed to them remarkably clever to lead Amelia on to talk of her religious beliefs, and to appear half convinced thereby ; and then to argue that—as she would have no further use of money after Christmas Day—it was absurd for her to continue to save it ; finally arriving at the obvious conclusion that she would be well advised if she handed all her spare cash over to them at once.

"You see, Amelia, it's in this way," argued Thomas, with a wink at his wife which his sister did not see ; "it's no good your puttin' by for your summer outin' as is your regular custom at Christmas time ; because, as far as I understand, you'll be takin' your next summer's outin' in the New Jerusalem, where it's all free, gratis, for nothink."

Amelia clasped her hands in an ecstasy. "Oh ! isn't it wonderful to think of, dear Thomas ? All the tiredness and the poverty over and done with, and nothing but glorious happiness for ever and ever ! Sometimes I can hardly believe it ; it seems too good to be true ; but I *do* believe it, all the same, because I know it is the truth and that our Lord when He comes will think nothing too good for His children and friends."

"Well, Amelia, all I say is that I envy you your good

opinion of yourself, makin' that sure as you'll be 'numbered with the saints,' as the Scriptures have it." It was Mrs. Thomas who spoke, and her knowledge of Holy Writ—as of other things—was somewhat shaky. "I've known folk quite as good as you and quite as deservin', who were too frightened of hell-fire to have time to turn their attention to the joys of Heaven."

"Oh! no, Sarah, it isn't that I am good or that I deserve anything; because I don't. I just take it all from the Lord as His free gift. Don't you understand? We can do nothing for ourselves, and can claim nothing; but through Christ we can do all things, and all things are ours. Life and death and things present and things to come; and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

But Amelia's theology—or S. Paul's either, for the matter of that—did not suit Mrs. Thomas Tovey. "Well, I don't understand such religion, and what's more I don't want to. I don't pretend to put myself on an equality with the saints, or to be dealt with quite the same as them; but I have been an honest, hard-working woman all my life, and a good wife to Thomas, and a good mother to the children; and if I don't get my proper reward for that I shall consider as I've not been fairly dealt by. There's somethink between expectin' to take a top place among the saints and angels, Amelia, and sayin' as you don't deserve anythink at the hands o' the Almighty but what He may choose to give you out o' charity; and that's my opinion, me not bein' presumptuous on the one hand, nor yet not knowin' what is due to me on the other."

Here Mr. Tovey interrupted the eschatological meditation of his better-half. "Never mind the future, Sarah; make your mind easy that you'll get your deserts, old girl, like the rest of us. But about your summer outin', Amelia? It's no good putting money by for what will never happen—that's clear; and besides, it seems not quite

complimentary to the Almighty, as you might say, to believe in one way and behave in another, as if you doubted His Word." This was a master-stroke on the part of the wily Thomas.

"Oh! Thomas, do you think so? Why, I wouldn't for the whole world do anything that looked like want of faith in my Saviour, or seemed in the very least to throw a shadow on my loyalty to the Master Whom I serve! Surely, surely, I have not done or said anything that could give anybody such an impression."

"Well, Amelia, I don't want to hurt your feelin's, but I can't help sayin' that puttin' by money for a trip to Aberystwith next summer—after all you've said about bein' so certain as you'll be in the New Jerusalem by then—does strike me a bit in that way."

This argument completely finished Amelia—she gave up her little hoard of savings at once; and rejoiced at the same time in being able to offer this tangible proof of her absolute belief in the teachings of her sect. And when Thomas—emboldened by his success in diplomacy—went on to add, "Now, 'pon my word, this is very convincin' on your part, Amelia, and shows me as there is some sense in your notions after all!" her warm heart overflowed with thankfulness that she had been thus privileged to testify to the truth.

Thomas and Sarah laughed in their sleeves at her credulity, and congratulated themselves and each other on their own worldly wisdom. But there is a wisdom of this world which is foolishness with God.

All the time Amelia was getting the tea ready, her brother and his wife made merry together over her simplicity; at least Thomas made merry, while Sarah sat and plumed herself upon not being such a fool as her sister-in-law, though a far more strictly religious person in every way.

"I'm very glad to see as you are such a changed character, Amelia," she remarked as they sat down to tea; "very glad indeed, for I used to think you sadly worldly and fond o' pleasure and given to dress, which was perhaps owin' to your takin' up the dressmakin', which is a very frivolous profession and full o' temptations for the unwary; but I'm not altogether comfortable in my mind at seein' you so cheerful-like and happy in your mind, since religion is given us to keep us serious and sober, and with the fear o' death always before our eyes."

"Oh! no, Sarah dear. The object of religion is to make us happier than anything, and to fill our lives with peace and holy joy. He came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly; not that we might turn our thoughts to death and decay, which He came in order to destroy."

But Mrs. Thomas still shook her head. "Well, Amelia, I'm bound to say that I haven't much confidence in that sort o' religion that makes people happy and cheerful-like; it's too light and frivolous for my taste, and isn't at all what I've been accustomed to. I'm afraid that too late you'll find out your mistake, and see that you have all along been cryin' peace, when there was no peace, and buildin' a house o' sand. And now, if you don't mind, I think I'll have a teaspoonful o' brandy in my tea, if you happen to have some in the house; as I feel a bit done up with all this talk about religion, and the walk from Merchester into the bargain; and I'm one as can't stand much fatigue without havin' a bit of a pick-me-up to support me," continued the self-righteous Sarah, who was one of those by no means uncommon so-called Christians who make up for spiritual sternness by physical self-indulgence.

It was a bitterly cold winter that year; and Miss Tovey was one of those small people who always feel the cold acutely. Moreover the state of religious emotion

and exaltation in which she now existed, did not tend to increase her never vigorous bodily strength. Her heart was not strong, and never had been, and she needed a good deal of care and consideration ; but as she had no one to supply her with these lubricants of the wheel of life, and was far too unselfish to supply them for herself, the hard winter fell heavily upon the little dressmaker. She did not even take as much care of herself as she was accustomed to take at this trying season of the year, because she was so certain that when Christmas came the need for taking care would be over, and there would be no more pain or weakness for her for evermore. She did not even trouble to save any money except what would keep her until Christmas Day, so sure was she that the Bridegroom would come then to possess the earth and to reign for ever and ever. Her only care was that she should have her lamp burning so as to be ready for Him when He came ; and every morning as she watched the dawn break, she poured out her soul in thanksgiving that it was one day nearer to the moment when He would come on the wings of the morning over the distant hills.

It was Christmas Eve, and Amelia was just going out to spend her last few shillings on the food necessary for that day, when Sarah arrived from Merchester with a pitiful story as to how she and Thomas were so short of funds that they literally had not enough to buy a Christmas dinner for themselves and their children ; and begged Amelia to help them. For a moment Amelia hesitated ; she had given all the money she possessed to Thomas and his wife, excepting just enough for her needs until the dawning of the Great Day ; and if she gave up that, she would have literally nothing to eat. But she hesitated only for a moment. Then she laughed to herself for her folly in supposing that anything mattered to-day, since everything would be put right to-morrow,

and that after to-day she could neither hunger nor thirst any more.

So she gave to her sister-in-law every penny that she had, forbearing to mention the fact that she had nothing in the world left. Perhaps even the self-righteous covetousness of Mrs. Thomas Tovey would have shrunk from exposing her husband's sister to the pangs of actual starvation; but with that sturdy old middle-class pride (whereof the upper and the lower classes are alike innocent) which regards its poverty as a thing to be hidden out of sight and never mentioned, Amelia would rather have died than confess how utterly impecunious she was. And Mrs. Thomas returned with her spoil to Merchester, grumbling that Amelia had not given her more.

Later in the day snow began to fall heavily; and Amelia sat over her last bit of fire feeling physically too weak and exhausted to venture out of doors, but uplifted by a spiritual fervour and ecstasy the happiness of which exceeded all words. When her last lump of coal had burnt out, she went supperless to bed; but her bliss was far too great for her to be conscious of any bodily pain or suffering.

"Amelia 'ull be fine put-out and disappointed when she wakes up to-morra mornin' and finds out her mistake," Thomas Tovey remarked with a laugh to his better-half as they retired for the night.

But he was wrong. It was he who had made the mistake; not Amelia.

All through that bitter Christmas Eve the little dressmaker was unconscious of either cold or hunger; for her mind was wandering, already half loosed from the trammels of the flesh, and she heard strains of heavenly music and saw visions of angels. "He is coming, He is coming!" she kept saying to herself as she passed from one dream of ineffable delight to another. And just as the first rays of

the rising sun gilded the edge of the horizon, turning its pinnacles into the battlements of a city made of jasper stone and of pure gold—just as the white-robed world, in the first flush of dawn, blushed as a bride blushes at the coming of the bridegroom, adorning herself for him with all her jewels—then Miss Tovey's most glorious hopes were fulfilled ; for on the wings of the morning, by the path of the dayspring, over the hills He came.

CHAPTER XXI

A FRESH DEVELOPMENT

In accordance with that strange propensity of human nature to say its tenderest words and to force its choicest gifts into ears and hands that are already closed by death, Miss Tovey's friends now accorded to her a consideration and regard which would have crowned her days with joy had she received it when living, but which was strictly denied her during her unselfish and innocent lifetime. It is remarkable how prone people are to withhold the encouraging word and the approving tribute as long as that word and that tribute can be of any use in brightening a comrade's path or in lightening a fellow-traveller's burden; and then—when the path has ended in the light which knows no shadow, and the burden has rolled away never more to return—they hasten to offer their now useless comfort and relief. They are chary of strewing with even the commonest flowers the dusty pathway of their fellow-pilgrims; but they do not hesitate to deck with the costliest exotics the empty sepulchres of those shining ones who now walk in the fields of fadeless asphodel, and feed among the lilies which flourish in the Paradise of God.

Thus it happened that words of praise and approval were uttered over Amelia's grave which would have made the whole difference in life to her had they but been uttered a year earlier; but now they came too late. Then her happiness lay in the hands of her neighbours, and they sternly withheld it from her; now it was secure in the

Hand of God, and nothing they could say could ever harm her any more. Yet they blamed her when their blame had power to hurt her, and they praised her when their praise could no longer please; which proved that the people of Dinglewood were made after the same pattern as the people in all other habitable parts of the earth.

"She was a perfect saint, was Amelia Tovey," remarked Mrs. Peppercorn; "a perfect saint, that's what Amelia was. And she died from the effects of unselfishness, which is a disease that don't seem likely ever to take the epidemic form."

"It was her brother Thomas and his wife as killed her, put it how you like," said Mrs. Paicey, the tears coursing each other down her comely cheeks. "I know'd what they was after every time I see them coming to Amelia's and sponging on her; that was their game, as you might say."

"And they sponged on her till they sponged her dry," added Mrs. Peppercorn, "and she died of starvation. Yes, Mrs. Paicey, you never spoke a truer word in your life than when you said as how Thomas Tovey and his wife killed poor Amelia."

Mrs. Paicey was right: they had indeed killed Amelia. But they had been powerless to hurt her; which was a distinction that neither Mrs. Paicey nor Mrs. Peppercorn could possibly understand.

"Many a time has Paicey said to me, 'Mary Ann,' he says, 'I can't understand how Tovey has the face to sponge on his poor sister as he does,' says he; 'it's downright unmanly and shameful,' he says; 'that's what I call it.' They never came near poor Amelia unless they wanted something out of her, so to speak, as Paicey and I often passed the remark; never once."

Mrs. Peppercorn nodded her head in acquiescence. "That's so, Mrs. Paicey; and for my part I don't alto-

gether relish visiting with folks as are made after that pattern. Them as are always asking for something, soon wear out their welcome as far as I am concerned. I'm very glad to see my friends and relations, and to give 'em of my very best at my own table; but when they begin asking for this, that and the other to take back home with 'em, then it's soon closing-time with me. I'm ready and willing to give 'indoor relief,' as they say at the workhouse; but when folks come asking for 'outdoor relief' as well, it's a bit too much!"

The two worthy matrons were standing by Amelia's grave after service on a Sunday morning, according to a ritual of Dinglewood which ordained that the last resting-place of the newly-departed should be visited by all their friends and neighbours at that particular hour of the day and week; and at this moment they caught sight of Claude Forrester and Dagmar Silverthorne walking away from church together.

"Ah! there goes young Mr. Forrester and Miss Silverthorne," exclaimed Mrs. Paicey; "it seems a pity as them two don't make a match of it, as you might say."

"So it does, Mrs. Paicey; you never spoke a truer word. Young folks are better married—and old ones too for the matter of that, though double-harness don't come always easy to them as have been running in the shafts too long."

"Well, Mr. Claude is young enough, so to speak, to suit anybody."

"He's young enough, Mrs. Paicey; but I'm not so sure about his common sense, ever since he made Theophilus Sprott Vicar of Dinglewood. A man who could do that might be very trying as a husband—very trying indeed; for there's nothing so trying in a husband as foolishness—except, perhaps, obstinacy."

"That is so, Mrs. Peppercorn, foolishness being a nuisance to everybody, as you might say."

"Not as you've got any call to say it, Mrs. Paicey—not any at all; for an easier man to live with than Mr. Paicey I never met."

For a few minutes her sense of justice and her wifely loyalty struggled for the mastery in Mrs. Paicey's gentle breast. Then the former won the day. "You never were more mistaken in your life, Mrs. Peppercorn, than when you said as Paicey was an easy man to live with. Steady and honest and sober and God-fearing, if you will; none more so. But when it comes to easiness, Paicey ain't in it with some."

"Well, of course you know better than I do," retorted Mrs. Peppercorn in a tone which implied that Mrs. Paicey did not really know half so well. "But when I talk about an easy pair of boots, I'm not only referring to one foot. Still, I doubt not as Mr. Claude will make a trying husband. Those very high-minded ones always do."

"It certainly was a pity him making Theophilus Sprott into our Vicar," remarked Mrs. Paicey; "but you've borne it better than I expected, Mrs. Peppercorn. At one time I was afraid as you'd give up coming to Church altogether and join the Chapel folk."

"Well, Mrs. Paicey, to tell you the truth so I should have done if the Chapel had been a bit nearer. But at my time of life three miles is three miles, whatever you may say. Some folks choose the highest Church, and some the lowest Church, according to taste; but when they are my age and my size, they choose the nearest Church, and rest and be thankful."

"And after all, Mrs. Peppercorn, Theophilus Sprott isn't as bad as we expected him to be; there's no denying that he isn't. I'm sure he visits well and looks after the poor,

and his sermons are as lowering to the spirits as anybody could wish."

Mrs. Peppercorn nodded her head emphatically. "That is so, Mrs. Paicey. And what's more important of all, he ain't guided by his mother in anything. Many a set-down has he given to her before my very eyes, and all honour to him for doing it! And as to taking her advice—why, he'd sooner go two miles in the opposite direction. If Mrs. Sprott never knew her place before, she's learnt it since her son became Vicar of Dinglewood; and for my part I'm not altogether sure that Mr. Claude made such a mistake after all in giving him the living," continued Mrs. Peppercorn, veering round from her original statement.

"Well, anyhow, Mr. Claude makes a mistake in not fancying Miss Dagmar, and her such a personable young lady, with all that money, and having turned her orphanage back into a monastery just to please him."

But Mrs. Peppercorn looked doubtful. "I'm not so sure as I approve of her changing her mind about the orphanage, Mrs. Paicey; mark my words, it don't do to pamper men too much! Let 'em have their own opinions about things as don't matter to nobody, and give 'em the victuals as they fancy; that's all right and proper, and behaving as a good wife should; but when it comes to turning your own plans topsy-turvy just to suit their whims, it's a different thing. I'm sure if Peppercorn were to search the world over he'd never find another wife who'd interfere less with his politics and more with his digestion than I do. 'Bless you, Peppercorn,' says I, 'it don't matter whether your food is taxed or whether it isn't as long as it don't disagree with you.' That's what I say to Peppercorn when he begins laying down the law on Free Trade and Protection and nonsense of that kind; for it don't matter to me how much rubbish he puts into his head, as long as he don't put any into his stomach."

"Ah! but you're a good wife, Mrs. Peppercorn, and no mistake. Many a time have I passed the remark to Paicey that there ain't a better wife in Dinglewood than yourself."

"Well, I try to be, Mrs. Paicey; and if folks try for a thing they generally get it, given that they've got a head on their shoulders," replied Mrs. Peppercorn with justifiable and becoming pride; "but if Peppercorn thinks as I'm the sort of wife that'll go and live with him in a monastery, or any nonsense of that kind, he'll soon find out his mistake. Which I'm afraid poor Miss Dagmar will do before she's done, if I know anything about men and their ways."

And it really seemed as if Mrs. Peppercorn's wisdom were not at fault in this particular instance, for Christmas had come and gone, and the New Year had started on its race, and yet poor Dagmar found herself as far as ever from the realization of her hopes and dreams. True, there was absolute peace between herself and Claude now; nay, there was more than peace, there was warm friendship; but Claude was once again so obsessed by the idea of the monastery—so absorbed with it to the exclusion of every other consideration—that love-making was further from his thoughts than ever. Dagmar was thankful for small mercies; anyhow, his friendship was better than his enmity; but she was slowly realizing that, as far as the attainment of her heart's desire was concerned, her great renunciation had been in vain.

Claude was full of praise and enthusiasm both for herself and her project; he was unsparing in his applause of her thoughts and words and works; but that was not what poor little Dagmar wanted. She longed for his love, rather than his approbation; she yearned for his tenderness rather than his praise. And the tragedy of it was that all the time Claude imagined he was doing her the

utmost honour; he was incapable of understanding how unsatisfying are even the most precious stones to the soul that is crying out for bread.

He had not the faintest idea that Dagmar had adopted the idea of the monastery solely to please him; had he understood this, no power on earth would have induced him to accept her sacrifice. He was one of the many men who believe what they are told; and he assumed that Dagmar had, through his preaching, been convinced of the error of her ways, and had thereupon straightway amended them. He was thankful that he had been chosen as the instrument whereby she was converted to the truth; but that he was the end, and not the means, was a thought that never once occurred to him.

It likewise never occurred to him to be jealous that this great work should be done after all by Dagmar and not by himself. If only it were done—if only a fair temple were raised in that lovely Mercian valley to be a shelter for weary pilgrims and a continual testimony to the Central Fact of the universe—it mattered not to him whether his own name were associated with it or not. Let his memorial perish with him, so long as the work of God were forwarded and the glory of God set forth! This was all he cared for.

Above all things he desired that the Will of God should be done; so far he fulfilled the ideal of the Christian life. But he was not yet content that that Will should be done in God's way and not in his own; wherein he still fell short of perfection.

It was an afternoon in the third week of January (as a rule the worst week of weather in the whole year), and snow was falling heavily; Claude was having tea with Dagmar and her chaperone in the morning-room which used to be Miss Fallowfield's special sanctum. As usual, the talk turned on the monastery; Claude never spoke or

thought about anything else in those days. The outer portion of the building was now approaching completion ; and its perfect symmetry and beauty testified to the proficiency and taste of the young architect who had designed it.

"It must all be beautiful," he said ; "but I want the chapel to be the most beautiful bit of all. I hold that the sacramental principle runs through everything, and that every visible thing of beauty should have an underlying meaning—should, in short, be a symbol of some hidden truth. Therefore as the central Event in history, in which all other events culminated, was the great Sacrifice upon Calvary Which the Church shows forth daily until her Lord comes again, so the holy place where that Sacrifice is commemorated should always be the innermost centre and the choicest spot of its surroundings—the heart of the rose of the world. That is why a church should always be the most beautiful thing in a village, and a cathedral the culminating point of a city, and the altar the most ornate part of a sacred building. I think you will see what I mean ?"

Like all men who are accustomed to lay down the law to an audience of admiring women, Claude was increasingly apt to indulge in long sentences and polished periods when conversing with Dagmar and Miss Perkins. His thoughts would always be beautiful and his ideals high ; but he would have expressed them with more reserve and less eloquence had he been thrown more into the society of his peers. The two ladies, however, considered his dicta most cultured and elevating, and did not hesitate to express this opinion both to each other and to him. And perhaps after all they were not so far wrong ; at any rate, Claude's somewhat old-fashioned pedantry was no worse than the slang of most of his contemporaries.

"Oh ! yes, I quite see what you mean, and I agree

with every word of it," Dagmar replied; "but then I always do agree with what you say, except when you are wrong; and you put things so beautifully that I always think you are right even when I know you are not."

"Yes, Mr. Claude," said Miss Perkins, "your views certainly do you great credit. You appear to me to have a most wonderful insight into the inner heart of things—remarkable indeed in one so young." Had Miss Perkins known the stronger sex a little better than she did, she would not have added that rider to her otherwise satisfactory comment. But in a girls' school one does not learn much of the ways of men.

Claude, however, forgave her aspersion on his age for the sake of her admiration of his sentiments. "Thank you, Miss Perkins," he said.

"I think, Dagmar," he continued, "that after a time I shall have to go abroad to collect among the ancient churches and religious houses of France and Italy some relics and things of beauty for the adornment of our chapel; and even if I do not succeed in collecting any actual pictures or images for the beautifying of our little Midland shrine, I shall certainly obtain some valuable hints as to how I can more perfectly model it upon the glorious patterns of the Middle Ages."

Dagmar's expressive face fell considerably. "Shall you be away long?" she asked, with an appealing note in her voice. "But even if it isn't really long, it will seem long to Perky and me left all alone by ourselves."

The appealing note struck Claude's not always very sympathetic ear. "I wasn't thinking of leaving you alone," he explained. "I was going to suggest that you and Miss Perkins should come with me, and help me. Your counsel and advice would be of the greatest assistance to me; and besides, when all's said and done, it is your chapel and not mine."

Dagmar's brow cleared at once. "Oh! Claude, that would be perfectly lovely. It would be the greatest fun going about with you, and picking up second-hand pulpits and worn-out altars and things of that kind to bring home with us. I should simply adore it!"

Miss Perkins corrected her quondam pupil. "I should hardly describe such a pursuit as fun, my love. I should rather say that it would be extremely instructive and elevating to assist Mr. Claude in searching for antique models on which to fashion the interior of his chapel; or, still better, in finding curios and relics which could be conveyed over here for its adornment."

"I know it would; that is precisely what I was saying, Perky dear," retorted Dagmar unabashed.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Claude; "I hear wheels coming up the park! Whoever can be paying calls on such an afternoon as this? It must be some woman or other; as I believe that women would pay calls if they had to cross burning mountains and frozen seas to do so. I never saw anything so mad in my life as the ordinary woman's passion for paying calls!"

Dagmar ran to the window, and peered through the falling snow at the approaching vehicle. "It looks like a cab from Merchester."

"But, my love, whom do you expect from Merchester on such a day and in such weather?"

"I've no idea, Perky dear. Oh! yes, I have. It must be Mr. Duncan coming to tell us something fresh about that tiresome old fortune!"

"But what could he have to tell us fresh?" asked Claude.

"I can't say. All I can say is that when I see anybody coming here unexpectedly from Merchester, I always know it is Mr. Duncan coming to tell us that the fortune has all the time belonged to somebody else who never had

it before, and that it has never belonged to the owner at all."

"Well, I'll go and see what the old gentleman really has to say; as he would certainly never have come all the way from Merchester in such fearful weather unless he had something of importance to communicate," said Claude, going out into the hall, as the cab had by that time stopped at the front door, and the occupant had alighted and rung the bell.

It was not many seconds before the butler answered the bell, and an elderly man stepped into the house, shaking off as he did so the snow which had collected on his coat even in those few seconds.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Duncan," said Claude, going forward in the fading light to meet him. "It is an awful day for you to have ventured out! I hope you aren't very wet."

Then the visitor turned, and the firelight fell upon his face. And Claude stopped short with a cry of amazement on perceiving that the newcomer was not Mr. Duncan at all, but his own father, Luke Forrester.

CHAPTER XXII

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

"YOU will wonder that I did not forewarn you of my arrival," said Mr. Forrester, when the first amazed greetings were over and the excitement and surprise had simmered down a little; "but the fact is I travelled as fast as any letter could; and I hesitated to send such startling news by telegram until I knew where you both were, and what you were doing. Besides, I did not know even if you were both alive—much less where you were living."

"And how did you find out?" was Dagmar's question.

"I stopped at Duncan's on my way through Merchester, and he told me all about everybody, and posted me up in all the current affairs."

Claude was almost stunned with the shock of his joy at finding that his father was yet alive. He could hardly speak. "Father, tell us where you have been—and how you were saved from the wreck," was all he could utter; and his voice trembled so that he could with difficulty say even that.

Luke Forrester laid his hand very lovingly on his son's shoulder, as they sat together by the fire. "Yes, my boy, I am coming to that. But first I am thinking how very good it is to be here, and to see your face again. God has shown wonderful mercy towards me. If only *she* were here—!" And tears filled his eyes, as he looked at the empty chair that always used to be Miss Fallowfield's.

Dagmar's glance followed his. "Now that you have

come back, I cannot help feeling that Aunt Charlotte might come back, too!"

But Mr. Forrester sighed and shook his head. "There is no coming back for those who have actually crossed the river, my child."

"But you see that until a quarter of an hour ago you were just as dead as Aunt Charlotte—at least, as far as we were concerned,—so that the return of one could not be more surprising than the return of the other."

"Let Mr. Forrester tell his story himself, love," interpolated Miss Perkins; "for we are all longing to hear how his valuable life was preserved."

"Yes, father, tell us," pleaded Claude.

Thus adjured, Luke Forrester began: "I have heard from Mr. Duncan all about Rainbrow's return, and how he was with my dear wife to the end, firmly believing that I had gone down with the sinking ship."

"He said he saw you go down," Dagmar interrupted.

Mr. Forrester smiled. "So much for human evidence! He saw me on the sinking ship, and he saw the ship capsize; but he could not have seen me go down, because I never did."

"What happened?" asked Claude.

"When the ship finally heeled over—which she did in about half an hour after the last of the boats had been put off—one of my fellow passengers and I were left clinging to a broken spar, which was soon drifted away from the immediate vicinity of the wreck. As far as I know, we were the only two who survived; but of course I could not tell what happened to anyone else after the ship capsized."

"I believe that your surmise is correct," said Miss Perkins. "At any rate, no other survivor has ever been heard of."

"Well, Johnson and I (Johnson was the name of the

man who was clinging to the spar with me) managed to hold on for what seemed a very eternity, and which was certainly a period of many hours; and just as we were feeling that we could hold on no longer but must let go, a schooner passed our way, and—through the mercy of God—caught sight of us, and we were saved."

"Thank God for that!" ejaculated Claude.

"Amen," his father added softly. Then he continued: "By the time we were hauled up on board we were both practically unconscious; and it was several days before we recovered sufficiently to realize our surroundings. Then we discovered that we were on a slave-ship which was employed in carrying negroes from the coast of Zanzibar to other ports, and there selling the poor creatures as slaves."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Dagmar. "I thought that there weren't any such things as slaves nowadays, but that they had all been abolished with the Corn Laws long before anybody was born."

Mr. Forrester sighed. "Would to God there were not! But alas! there are; and, what is worse, the trade is carried on by men belonging to so-called Christian countries."

"How very terrible!" exclaimed Miss Perkins.

"Terrible indeed! More terrible than you can have any conception of. For there is not only the damning fact that men from so-called Christian countries deliberately sell, as they would sell brute beasts, those weaker brethren for whom Christ died; there is also the minor detail that during their transit from one port to another, those weaker brethren are subjected to cruelties which are not fit to be described to civilized ears!" And Mr. Forrester shuddered at the mere recollection of the miseries he had witnessed upon the slave-ship.

"What happened next?" asked the ever-practical Dagmar, after a moment's pause.

"What happened next, my child, was, that neither Johnson nor I could stand on one side and see such horrible atrocities committed. In the Name of the Master Whom we serve, we first remonstrated with the captain and his crew, and then denounced them. But it was all alike of no avail. They were a motley crew, made up of the scum of several nationalities; and their ears had been deafened, by long years of evil living, to the Voice of God as uttered through His servants."

"Then did they torture you, too, for interfering?" asked Claude, and his breath came thick and fast.

"No, my son," was the quiet reply; "they did worse than that. They made us plainly to understand that if we would hold our tongues and take no notice of their nefarious trade, they would land us at the next port with no further ado, whence we could make our way back to England; but that if we persisted in defying them, and in doing our utmost to help the poor creatures who had fallen into their clutches, they would maroon us on the next uninhabited island that their schooner passed, and leave us there to spend the remainder of our days as best we could."

"Oh! if I had been you I should have let the poor negroes alone then," said Dagmar; "you see, you couldn't do them any good, and you might do yourselves a most fearful lot of harm."

"And what of that?" cried Claude. "The obligation to fulfil our duty is not limited by the possible unpleasantness of the consequences incurred by the fulfilment of that duty. Dagmar, I am ashamed of you!"

Poor Dagmar sighed. "I can't help that. All I know is that if there was something the doing of which wouldn't do anybody else any good and might do me a lot of harm, I shouldn't do it. That's all. If hurting oneself saves other people from being hurt, there's something in it, I admit.

In that case I should consent to be hurt myself—at least I hope I should. But I cannot see the point of voluntarily suffering pain, and nobody else being one penny the better for it. I can't really ; not having been made according to the hair-shirt and peas-in-the-shoes pattern." What the girl said was absolutely true. She was capable of making any sacrifice, provided it was first proved to her that practical and tangible good would result therefrom ; but the performance of a sacrifice from which, as far as she could see, nobody derived any obvious advantage was quite beyond her powers.

"If I thought it was right to do a certain thing, I trust that I should be able to shut my eyes altogether to possible results," said Claude, thereby proving the innate difference between himself and the girl who loved him.

"To tell the truth," said Mr. Forrester with a smile, "it never occurred to me that there was any alternative. You see, my children, I belong to a generation which never learned to analyse its feelings and dissect its motives, as you do ; and I cannot lay claim to any calm and deliberate choosing of the right path. It never once entered my head to weigh the consequences or to make any voluntary sacrifice. I simply saw no other course before me but to persist in lifting up my voice against the abominations of slavery ; and consequently Johnson and I were both marooned."

"Then was Mr. Johnson as—as—self-sacrificing as you were ?" inquired Dagmar (but "self-sacrificing" was not the word she originally intended to use).

"He likewise belonged to the blind generation who neither analyse nor dissect their spiritual nature ; and he saw no alternative any more than I did. Oh, Dagmar, my dear, the last generation were what you young people would call a very stupid lot !" And Mr. Forrester fairly laughed.

"And do you mean to say that those devils landed you and Johnson on a desert island and left you there?" asked Claude.

"Precisely. And there I stayed for a year and a half."

Claude gave a great sob. "Father, I wonder how you could bear it!"

"I could not have borne it had I been alone."

"Then was Mr. Johnson such a comfort to you?" asked Dagmar.

"Johnson? Oh! I wasn't thinking of Johnson. No, poor fellow; he succumbed very soon, and I laid his body to rest under a palm tree, where he still waits for the Resurrection Morning, while his spirit is serving God in other and wider spheres."

Dagmar looked puzzled. "But you said you couldn't have borne it if you had been alone, and yet you were alone most of the time."

"Never alone for a single moment, my child. Though that deserted island was indeed a valley of the shadow of death, there was One with me, Whose rod and staff were my perpetual comfort; and therefore I feared no evil. He opened my eyes, and I saw; and behold the island was full of horses and chariots of fire round about me; and I knew that nothing could hurt me or do me any harm. So I laid me down and slept, and the Lord sustained me; and He has never failed me nor forsaken me from that day to this."

"But what about poor Mr. Johnson?" asked Miss Perkins. "Was he unable to bear the strain of such a terrible experience?"

"He was, poor soul! And so God took him."

"And you? What happened to you, father, that is what we are dying to hear?"

"As for me, my son, the Lord was with me, as I have

told you; and He fed me in the wilderness as of old time He fed His servant Elijah. Through His all-merciful Providence I was kept alive on that island for the space of a year and a half. Some day I will tell you all about my life there, but I am too weary now. And then at last I was successful in attracting the attention of a passing ship —not a slave-ship this time, thank God!—and so was delivered out of my solitary captivity and brought home to England."

"Oh, father, how good God has been to have spared your life!" And Claude's eyes overflowed with tears of gratitude.

"He has, my boy. But He would have been just as good if He had seen fit to take me—as he took my dear wife—to serve Him in the next phase of eternal life more fully and perfectly than it is possible to serve Him within the limitations of our present existence. We are all in His Hands, and whatever He does is best."

And then Mr. Forrester went on to impart sacred confidences as to his last words with his wife, and all the suffering he had endured since her death, while the two young people listened with tears running down their faces; and Miss Perkins tactfully withdrew on the plea of seeing that a room was prepared for the wanderer, and everything made comfortable for his reception.

After they had dined, and the excitement of Mr. Forrester's return had in some measure subsided, they sat down again round the morning-room fire; and the wanderer gave them more details as to his perils by land and sea. But no reference was made to the late Mrs. Forrester's fortune. That burning subject—by common though unspoken consent—was allowed to stand over until the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

THE next morning dawned bright and frosty; and Claude took his father to see the monastery, which already gave promise of the exquisite beauty that would distinguish it when completed. Snow carpeted the little valley, while the stream and lakelet were covered with thick ice; and the perfectly-proportioned building, rising from the white earth into the pale blue heavens and embowered in a tracery of branches which had been changed from copper into silver by the alchemy of the hoar-frost, was a beautiful sight indeed.

As they stood looking at the lovely vision, Claude gave his father a rough idea of the scheme of the building and its endowment; and described, as briefly as he could, all that the monastery was intended to be to its occupants and to the surrounding neighbourhood. He was so sure that his father would understand and enter into his conception, that he waxed eloquent in his description of the natural and spiritual beauty of which this building was to be both a channel and an expression, carrying Divine Grace and artistic culture to all who came within the sphere of its influence. And when he had finished his description and explanation, he turned towards the elder man in certain expectation of the seal of paternal encouragement and approval.

For a few moments there was silence, as Mr. Forrester stood drinking in the almost unearthly beauty of the scene; then he said:

"It is indeed a beautiful idea, my son, and one that does both you and Dagmar infinite credit. I only wish it could be carried out, as I believe with you, that an institution of this kind would be of infinite value and assistance to the Church of England in these parts. But, alas! it is impossible."

Claude's face paled with the shock of an utterly unexpected and inexplicable disappointment. "I don't understand! How can it be impossible when all the plans and arrangements are already made, and the fabric nearly completed?"

"It is impossible, because my wife gave me full instructions as to how her large fortune was to be laid out in the event of her death; and there was no suggestion of an institution of this kind in any of her designs."

"But, father, the fortune is yours, isn't it?"

"It is, legally; but morally I have no right to dispose of it save as she instructed me. She told me not long before her death, and after we had held much consultation together, that she intended to give the whole of her vast property—after making due provision for Dagmar and myself—to the building of almshouses for decayed gentlewomen, and the provision of small pensions for the same. And I have no option but to carry out her instructions."

The young man's eyes filled with tears of mortification and anguish. It seemed too cruel for his great scheme to miscarry after all, when it was so near to fulfilment. He was too much distressed to be able to speak.

His father laid a tender hand upon his shoulder. "Do not misunderstand me, my boy. I am full of approval and admiration for your scheme; and for my own part should have far more sympathy with the building and endowment of an institution of this kind, than for the erection of almshouses for the shelter of worn-out gentlewomen. But my wife would not have agreed with me;

I am convinced of that. And it is her fortune that we are laying out ; not our own. I tell you candidly that if the money were mine to do with as I liked, hampered by no conditions whatever, I should not hesitate to throw myself heart and soul into your project. Farther than that, I am proud to have a son who has conceived such an idea, and I should have been rejoiced to follow and support him in carrying it out. But the money is not mine morally, whatever it may be in the eyes of the law ; I am only a trustee for my wife's property, bound to carry out her instructions ; and I have no alternative but to do so."

"But you are more than a trustee legally," persisted Claude.

"I know I am. Morally I am nothing but my wife's trustee ; but legally I am sole possessor of her vast fortune."

"Then no one would interfere if you spent the money in any way you chose ?" Fresh hopes began to revive in Claude's heart.

"No one. As far as the law is concerned, I have a perfect right to do whatever I like with the money : I could play ducks and drakes with it if I chose."

"Then surely if you carry out my step-mother's wishes and spend it in charity, you have the right to exercise your superior wisdom in selecting the particular charities on which it is to be expended ?"

Mr. Forrester shook his head. "I do not think so."

"But, father," urged Claude, "you admit that the monastery is a higher and more useful thing than a set of almshouses."

"Certainly, I fully admit that. But I cannot do evil that good may come ; do not tempt me, my son."

But Claude still pleaded. "Given, as you say, that the monastery is really a better and more beneficial form of charity than almshouses, don't you think that my step-mother would have agreed with you if ever you had laid

the idea of the monastery before her? Oh, how I wish that I had spoken to her about it before she went away! She was always so interested in charitable schemes. I can't think why I didn't talk to her about it, fool that I was! But it never once occurred to me to do so."

"I do not think it would have made any difference if you had."

"Why not?"

"Because in all our conversations upon the subject—and they were long and many—my dear wife was always firm upon one point; namely, that her money should be laid out for the advantage of women and not of men."

"I'm surprised at that; for—unlike Dagmar—she was a woman who always liked men better than her own sex."

"That is true. She has often said to me that men and their ways of looking at things appealed to her much more than did the feminine point of view. There was a distinct masculine strain in her strength of intellect and her breadth of outlook, and she had far more in common intellectually with men than with women."

"Then," cried Claude eagerly, "I'm sure that—if it had once been put before her—the idea of the monastery would have appealed to her more than that of the almshouses."

They were walking homewards by this time, as it was too cold to remain standing for long to gaze at the almost completed edifice; and as they walked, Mr. Forrester slipped his arm affectionately through his son's. "No, my boy; you are mistaken there. I knew your stepmother better than you did, and I am aware that though she liked men better than women, she pitied women the more; and she always intended to leave her fortune to ameliorate the lot of single women. She was undecided as to the best means of doing this; but she never wavered as to the end in view. I remember her saying, half in joke

and half in earnest, how much she approved of Queen Elizabeth's presentation of a drying-ground to the women of Bristol as a compensation to them for being so ill-favoured; and that she intended to do something on the same lines herself."

"Oh, father!" It was all that Claude could trust himself to say.

"I know it is hard to bear, my boy; very hard indeed. It is always hard to bear when God thunders forth from Sinai, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor any likeness of anything which is in heaven or earth—not even of thine own conception of thy duty to Me and to thy fellow-men, or thine own self-appointed ways of serving Me and doing Me honour. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them!' We all have to hear these words sooner or later; and, hearing, to obey them."

"Then do you think that I was making an idol of the monastery, and that this is my punishment?"

"It was a noble form of idolatry, my son—perhaps the noblest that there is; but I think that nevertheless it was an infringement of the second Commandment. And I do not call this a punishment. I call it merely God's vindication of Himself—His lesson to you that His Will must be done in earth as it is in heaven. For not only must His Will be done; it must be done in His Own Way and not in ours: which is a lesson that some of the greatest saints have found it not easy to master. 'Get thee behind Me, Satan! thou art an offence unto Me!' You see, that even the greatest of the Apostles had to be rebuked, as you are being rebuked to-day, for wanting to fulfil God's Will in his own way. So you have erred and been convicted of error, in good company."

"But I wasn't doing it in any way for my own glory—at least, I honestly don't think I was. If I had been, I

could have borne the disappointment better, as I should have felt that I deserved it."

"Neither was Saint Peter: he was trying, as he thought, to make things easier for his Master, and there was no thought of self mixed up in it at all. But he had to learn the lesson of submission as well as the lesson of unselfishness. God will not be dictated to, even if our dictation is inspired by our zeal for Him."

"Then you feel certain that Mrs. Forrester would not have consented to the idea of the monastery even if I had suggested it to her?" Claude persisted.

"I do, absolutely certain; and you must remember that my business is not to do what I think best with my wife's fortune, but to carry out what she thought best. As I tell you, before she died she had made up her mind to build almshouses for impecunious single gentlewomen over sixty years of age; and to endow the same with pensions. She was very peremptory on the point that they were to be single women—not widows. Widows, she said, ought to be provided for by their husbands or kept by their children; but poor spinsters had nobody to turn to, and so she would stand their friend."

Claude fairly groaned. "I am afraid this is the death-blow of the monastery."

"I am afraid it is—as a monastery. But the building can be perfectly well adapted to serve the purposes of an almshouse; that is to say, the inmates can lead a sort of collegiate life, each having her own bedroom and sitting-room, and all meeting together for meals in the great hall and for daily services in the chapel. So that, although I fear you must sacrifice your beautiful social idea, you need not sacrifice your beautiful architectural conception as well. Nor will you altogether lose your spiritual ideal: for the exquisite little chapel will still stand as a fountain of Divine Grace in the midst of this lovely valley, testifying

to the surrounding neighbourhood the One great Truth of the universe, and daily celebrating the Commemoration of the One great Sacrifice."

And thus endeavouring to reconcile his son to the bitter yet (so it seemed to him) inevitable disappointment, Luke Forrester walked slowly back to the Hall.

But although Mr. Forrester succeeded in convincing Claude that it was the right thing for the monastery to be given up, he did not succeed in comforting the young man for the loss of the same. That duty was reserved for smaller and tenderer hands.

For a few days poor Claude was in the depths of depression. Even the return of his father could not altogether make up for the loss of his day-dream—which seemed now doubly hard to bear after it had already been taken away from him and restored again. To lose anything for the second time is always harder to bear than it was at the first : the blasting of revivified hopes seems more cruel than the destruction of the original ones. For the first time in his life, however, Claude did not turn for consolation to the idealized thought of his mother, nor indulge in imaginings—as he usually did when disappointed and unhappy—how she would have understood and comforted him had she been here. Instead of that, he went to Dagmar, and poured out his bitter disappointment into her sympathetic ears ; and in no way did she fall short of his needs and expectations.

"I think it is perfectly maddening for a beautiful building like that to be thrown away upon a lot of stupid old women!" she remarked, after they had gone over the ground for about the fiftieth time.

"Single women over sixty ! Just think of it," groaned Claude.

"I know. As if it could matter to anybody of

that age where they lived or what they did!" added Dagmar.

"That is just the irony of the whole thing. All that natural and architectural beauty is to be thrown away upon people who are far too old to have any sense of enjoyment or appreciation of beauty left!" And Claude laughed aloud with the arrogance of twenty-five.

Dagmar laughed, too. Thoroughly to understand the humour of a situation, people must be pretty much of the same age. The idea of expecting elderly people to enjoy themselves would not have seemed at all absurd to Mr. Forrester and his late wife; but these latter would have descried a certain unconscious humour in Claude and Dagmar's criticisms nevertheless.

"I expect they'll all be blind and deaf," continued Dagmar, "and so will never see the beauty of the chapel or the view, or hear the music of the stream and the chapel-bell. But I suppose you'll go on making it just as beautiful as if it was for people like us who could appreciate it?"

"Of course I shall, Dagmar. I am making it as beautiful as I possibly can because it is God's House, and my work upon it is an offering to Him."

"I see. And so when you have once given it to Him, it is no business of yours whether He uses it for young men or for old women. Your gift is the same whatever He chooses to do with it afterwards. In fact, I think it adds to the beauty of your gift if it is used for a useless purpose; like the woman with the alabaster box of ointment, which was better poured out than if it had been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor." Dagmar certainly was a past mistress in the art of consolation, if not in the choice of language.

Claude cheered up visibly. "Yes, yes; that is a very

comforting idea to me. I am glad you have reminded me of the alabaster box of ointment, Dagmar. It was because the Master accepted the gift that it was apparently wasted —not because He refused it."

"Of course it was. And I wonder that had not struck you before, because it was the sort of thing to appeal to you more than to me. *You* can understand David pouring out before the Lord the water which the mighty men had brought from the well at Bethlehem ; but to *me* it always seems the most irritating thing he could have done, just when they'd put themselves out so to get it for him."

"I can quite understand his doing it," Claude repeated.

"I know you can ; and I can't. But that ought to make you glad that your monastery is being treated in exactly the same way."

"Thank you, Dagmar. Now that I look at it in this light I feel I can bear it. It is my alabaster box of ointment—my water from the well of Bethlehem—and I freely pour it out at the Master's feet."

Thus Dagmar succeeded in comforting Claude. And it was significant that both the young people regarded the money and time and trouble spent on the erection of almshouses for old women as "wasted." Such are the limitations of youth !

"And then," she went on after a while, "when people see how beautiful the almshouses are, and how splendidly you have designed them, they'll discover what a magnificent architect you are ; and I daresay in the end you'll have dozens of monasteries to build, to say nothing of churches and chapels."

This also was a comforting view of the matter. "Then you think that the idea of the monastery may come true even yet, Dagmar, in some other place and at some future time ?" Claude asked.

"I am positively certain of it. You'll have to write

articles about it in religious papers and magazines and things of that kind, and get people to take it up. And when they come and see the building here, do you suppose they'll be content to let a lot of stupid old women have the monopoly of anything so perfectly lovely? Not they! They'll start the monastery idea somewhere else, and get you to build it for them; because even Mr. Forrester admits that it *is* a better idea than the almshouses, if only Aunt Charlotte hadn't been so keen on the old women before she died. And all the world isn't in love with old women, as Aunt Charlotte seems to have been!"

The two were walking along the old high-road, as they had so often walked together in time past; but to-day there was somehow a difference. Dagmar could not exactly define what it was; in fact, she did not attempt to do so, as—despite her excessively modern attitude of mind—she was not really an analytical young person; but she understood it sufficiently to know that it was the sort of thing that made silence uncomfortable, and so she forthwith went on talking.

"Isn't this a dear old road?" she said, being "gravelled for lack of matter." "I never get tired of it, though I have walked along it such thousands of times; and there is always a feeling of excitement when you get to a turn, although you really know as well as possible what you will see when you have passed it. But that is why a road is always fascinating, I think—much more fascinating than a wood or a moor or a meadow; you never know what is coming next, and even if you do, you feel as if you don't, which is almost as good in the long run. My idea of happiness is to go on walking for ever in bright frosty weather along a wide high road, with something nice at the end of it and somebody equally nice to keep me company."

Then she paused to take breath, and Claude seized the

opportunity. "I say, Dagmar, you've been awfully decent to me all through this monastery business. I don't know whatever I should have done without you. And I want you to promise that you'll always stick to me and walk by my side, wherever the road may lead to." Claude no longer discoursed in fine sentences and finished periods. At this particular crisis his vocabulary was as limited as a schoolboy's. "Will you, dear? I want you so dreadfully."

Dagmar's eyes shone like stars. "Do you really want me, Claude? Really and truly?"

"I should just think I do! Why, I don't believe I shall ever do anything really great unless I've got you to help me, and encourage me and sympathize with me; but if I've got that, I am sure that in time I shall rise to really high things in my profession, and give you good reason to be proud of me and my work." It was characteristic of Claude that even then he thought of his work and of what Dagmar would be to *it*, rather than what she would be to *him*. And it was characteristic also of Dagmar that she accepted the position without a murmur, and took exactly what he was prepared to give, asking neither more nor less; wherein she showed herself the sort of woman that men find it easy to live with. The continual striving after an impossible ideal may lend beauty and romance to single blessedness, but it is by no means one of the ingredients of connubial bliss. Divine discontent may be a valuable assistant to a solitary player in the game of life; but it is a most unsatisfactory equipment for a "twosome."

"Darling, won't you marry me," Claude went on, "and let us never do anything by ourselves any more, but everything together? Oh! Dagmar dear, do come to me, and let us walk the rest of the way side by side."

And of course Dagmar came.

Thus Claude found comfort at last for the destruction of his day-dream ; and, with the glorious hopefulness of youth, built still finer and fairer abbeys and cathedrals in the air, which he felt no doubt he should transmute into solid masonry before many years were over. For he was still on that sunny side of thirty when all things are possible to us, and when we feel that we have time enough and strength enough to accomplish anything we choose.

And Dagmar was abundantly happy in his love, and content to take the second place in his life, realizing that he was sufficient of an artist for his art always to come first. She had early learnt the lesson that ideal perfection is not for us mortals. We must take the best that we can get and make the best of it, even though it be not the absolute bliss that we once dreamed it would be. Enough for us that it is good and that it is our own ; for after all we are but wayfarers and pilgrims, and must not expect perfection by the way, but only at our journey's end. So let us press forward with a good courage, knowing that the best is not here but hereafter. This is the true spirit of the road.

There was a little difficulty at first as to who was really the Vicar of Dinglewood now that Mr. Forrester had come back again ; but the Bishop of Merchester solved this difficulty by presenting Theophilus Sprott to the incumbency of a large church in the Black Country, where he would have more work—and considerably more pay—than he had enjoyed at Dinglewood ; and where he would also find that larger scope for which his soul had always pined.

"You will doubtless be pleased to escape from the aristocratic stagnation of the country into the vigorous activity of a large town," said Mrs. Higginson, who had met Theophilus in the village and stopped to congratulate him upon his new appointment. "My dear papa, the Doctor, used so often to say, 'There is more life in the town than in the country, because there are more people' ; and

I have so often realized the truth of this since I came to live in the country myself."

"On the contrary," replied Theophilus, "the thought of all the worry and bustle of a manufacturing town chills my very blood. I hate the whirl and pressure of middle-class activity, and always shall; but I have no alternative but to accept this living, now that the Bishop has seen fit to offer it to me. To tell the truth, Mrs. Higginson, I feel that I have been very badly treated; shelved, in fact, to make way for my predecessor to step into his old shoes."

"Oh! I imagined that you would be pleased," murmured Mrs. Higginson feebly.

But Theophilus met her with fine scorn. "Pleased, Mrs. Higginson? Is any man pleased to have the bread taken out of his very mouth to be given to another? I was Vicar of Dinglewood, and had been so for the past year and more. Yet just because Mr. Forrester was not drowned when he expected to be, I am turned out of hearth and home in order that he may enjoy once more a position which to all intents and purposes he had forfeited."

"But surely you need not have accepted this new living if you had not wished to do so; and then I think the dear Bishop could hardly have turned you adrift. Besides, Mr. Forrester himself is quite a gentleman, and could hardly have taken the living of Dinglewood again into his own possession unless you had voluntarily resigned it."

Theophilus laughed bitterly. "Oh! yes; they knew their business well enough to lay a neat trap for me, and to make it appear to the outside world that I acted according to my own inclination. Do you suppose that a man in my position could afford to offend his Bishop by refusing a living that his lordship offered to me? Certainly not. But that is the way in which the great ones of the earth

trample upon their poorer brethren. I had no option but to do as the Bishop dictated ; and to tie myself down in the midst of a commercial and low-born population on whom my natural gifts and acquired accomplishments will alike be thrown away."

"It would certainly have been a mistake to offend the dear Bishop," said Mrs. Higginson. "In fact, I think it is always a mistake to offend those who are in a higher social position than ourselves. They so often can be of use to us ; and, even if they cannot, it is always pleasant to be on bowing terms with them, and seems to confer a distinction and dignity upon us."

"Yes ; it would have been a mistake to offend the Bishop. His lordship and Mr. Forrester knew that well enough. They had me in a cleft stick. But I ought to have known better than to expect anything different, since misfortune and ill-luck have dogged my footsteps ever since I was born. It is time I made up my mind to it, and realised that bitterness is to be my portion all the days of my life ; but it is hard to give up hope, even when one is turned forty, and particularly when one sees that one's ill-luck is in no way one's own fault, but is all the doing of some malignant and adverse Power. If I felt that I deserved misfortune, I should submit to it more gracefully ; but as it is, I admit that I rebel."

And so Theophilus continued to grumble after his kind, and would so continue till the end of the chapter, human nature not being alterable by circumstances. We are all very fond of saying "If this," and "If the other," we should be saints and angels and the like, forgetting that there is no such word as "if" in the vocabulary of Heaven. He who is discontented will be discontented still, though Fate and Fortune lavish their gifts at his feet ; while he who is righteous will be righteous still, though the Powers of darkness array themselves against him.

And here we will drop the curtain upon the commonplace drama of Dinglewood. Our characters were not saints or heroes at the beginning, and they are not saints or heroes at the close, but just ordinary middle-class men and women, living in an ordinary Midland village, and striving—according to their lights—to do their several duties in the various states of life to which they have been called.

Claude and Dagmar are happy in the prospect of the future—Luke Forrester is peaceful in the contemplation of the past. Mrs. Peppercorn and Mr. and Mrs. Sprott continue to pursue their daily avocations with a cheerful courage; while Theophilus and Mrs. Mawer and Miss Skinner enjoy their own especial grievances in their own peculiar way. Octavius Rainbrow is fast making his mark in the world of journalism: and Mr. Duncan is living again in his nephew's career. Here we leave them all as we found them—none absent except Charlotte Fallowfield and Amelia Tovey. They two are already fulfilling life's purposes and serving their Maker in other and wider spheres; and so are the happiest and most blessed of all.

In the centre of Dinglewood Park—not far from the old Roman road—there stands a house of rest for weary pilgrims, where they may take their ease for a little while before they pass onwards, across the river to the land which is no longer so very far off. Nature and art have combined to render this spot beautiful exceedingly, so as to make it a fitter preparation for those glories which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, and yet which the pilgrims are now so nearly approaching. The life in this house of rest is conventual in its mysticism and regularity; but the inmates are hampered by no dedication and bound by no vows; it is fashioned upon the life at Little Gidding in the seventeenth century, and has all the peace of a convent without its austerity. Here

the tired travellers tarry for awhile, when it is towards evening with them and their day is far spent; and here they find light at eventide. There are certain of their company who in their time have seen visions of angels; and these cheer their companions with stories of all that their Lord has done for them, and how that He is risen indeed.

Here this band of godly women all wait together in faith and hope, until it is time for them, one by one, to go up to the New Jerusalem. In the fair refectory, as they sit at meat, they commune one with another as to all the wonderful things that have happened to them by the way; and of how all these things worked together for their good, because One drew near and walked with them, though at the time their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. And in the beautiful little chapel dedicated to Saint Mary of Bethany and adorned with stained windows representing all the virgin saints, where everything tends to symbolize the fact that there are some women called to forego the common lot of domestic toil and happiness and to choose the better part of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, these blessed souls find still greater rest and refreshment; for here His ministers expound unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself; and here the Master is made known to them in Breaking of Bread.

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NEW FICTION

The following list of Cassell's Autumn Novels is a particularly strong one, including works by the most famous of modern fiction-writers. The stories are varied and of fascinating interest, and deserve the attention of all fiction-lovers who appreciate really good Novels.

THE GHOST KINGS

By H. Rider Haggard

Author of "Benita," "King Solomon's Mines," etc.

With 8 Illustrations by A. MICHAEL. 6*s.*

Once more we have the presentation of a girl of wonderful charm, who through no desire of her own is endowed with mystical properties by the superstitious natives. Mr. Rider Haggard doubtless knows more of the Zulus than any other writer of our day, and he introduces here a picture of that nation under Dingaan which is both vivid and convincing. Their dealings with the heroine, her lover, and the renegade European who lives with them, form some of the chief incidents of the book, but it is the love story of the mysterious maiden, of her wanderings in the land of the Ghost Kings—surely one of the weirdest regions Mr. Haggard has ever imagined—of the search of her lover for her, and of their reunion after many strange adventures which make up a romance of exciting and fascinating interest.

THE VIRGIN IN JUDGMENT

By Eden Phillpotts

Author of "The Mother," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by GUNNING KING. 6*s.*

Once again Mr. Eden Phillpotts has woven a fascinating romance with "Dartymoor" as the base of the fabric, but the design and substance are new, vigorous, and altogether pleasing. The general characters of the story will rank among Mr. Phillpotts' finest creations, but Rhoda—who gives the title to the book—will doubtless live as his greatest. This strange child of the moor, with her curious, weird temperament, forms one of the most subtle studies in femininity in modern literature.

Margaret Stanbury, who comes into unwilling conflict with Rhoda, through her marriage with Rhoda's favourite brother, and in whom the tragedy of the story centres, is a gentle, loving creature, the direct antithesis of the coldly virtuous girl of the moor.

The other characters in the book are drawn in an equally excellent manner, while the descriptive writing well sustains Mr. Phillpotts' reputation in this direction.

SIR RICHARD ESCOMBE

By Max Pemberton

Author of "Wheels of Anarchy," &c.

With Frontispiece in Colour by CYRUS CUNEO, R.I. 6*s.*

Mr. Max Pemberton has selected as the principal theme of his new story the notorious society of St. Francis in the reign of George II. and its strange doings at Medmenham Abbey. The main interest, however, centres round Sir Richard Escombe and his charming Kitty Dulcimore, and in the recital of their love story, with its many vicissitudes, adventures, misunderstandings, and reconciliations, it will be found that the author has provided one of the best romances associated with his name.

The setting of the story is of absorbing interest. Mr. Pemberton gives a picture of aristocratic life under "German George" which is almost as fascinating as his fictional creations. The constitution of that curious order of St. Francis and its atrocious orgies at Medmenham Abbey have never before been presented in such a fashion. It is difficult to realise that this is fact grafted into fiction.

MISS FALLOWFIELD'S FORTUNE

By Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler

(The Hon. MRS. ALFRED FELKIN)

With 4 Illustrations by STEVEN SPURRIER. 6*s.*

Miss Fallowfield, while deploring her poverty, is left a million pounds. She is afterwards married to the Rev. Luke Forrester, who has a son named Claude by a former marriage. The bride and bridegroom depart to Australia on a honeymoon tour; news comes home that the ship has been wrecked and both of them drowned. The question of the disposal of the fortune arises. If Mrs. Forrester died before her husband the money will have passed to the latter, and from him to Claude; but if Mr. Forrester was first deceased the fortune belongs to the bride's niece, Dagmar, beloved by Claude. He and Dagmar have widely divergent views of the best way to spend the money. The Probate Court decides in favour of the husband having survived the wife, on the ground that man is stronger than woman. Later a witness states that the wife outlived the husband.

How all these difficulties, which obscure the question as to who is legally entitled to the money, are overcome must be left to the reader to discover. Amusing scenes in village life are described in the author's best style, and the story scintillates with epigrams.

THE GOLDEN PRECIPICE

By H. B. Marriott Watson

Author of "Galloping Dick," "The Privateers," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by W. HERBERT HOLLOWAY. 6*s.*

Mr. Marriott Watson has, in this novel of treasure-seeking, crowded sensational scenes one upon another. Directly the steamer sets off upon her journey stirring episodes happen on board. Then follows an attempt to maroon the captain and others, which is frustrated by the engineer, a mighty man of muscle. A mutiny breaks out, and the reader is hurried from one scene of fighting to another. Plots and counterplots are formed by the two parties to gain the treasure cavern, which is found to be bare. After some exciting adventures with his lady-love, the engineer obtains a fresh clue, the treasure is found, the mutineers defeated, and the steamer starts for home.

MAD BARBARA

By Warwick Deeping

Author of "Uther and Igraine," "The Slanderers," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CHRISTOPHER CLARK, R.I. 6*s.*

The author of "Uther and Igraine" has followed up his brilliant success with a first-rate piece of work, which is certain to win the admiration of the critics and the reading public. The dialogue in "Mad Barbara," and the dramatic scenes which the story contains, exhibit all Mr. Warwick Deeping's accustomed felicity of phrasing. The plot, which he develops with great skill, is laid in the Stuart period and is one of absorbing interest.

ROSE-WHITE YOUTH

By Dolf Wyllarde

Author of "Mafoota," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by P. B. HICKLING. 6*s.*

A study of girlhood verging into womanhood is here presented in a manner which arrests attention at the first line and fascinates to the last. Betty, the schoolgirl, with her slang, her grit, her honesty of purpose—but withal, her puzzling femininity, is a character who will secure admiration from all readers. A girl's heart—who can understand it? But Dolf Wyllarde has at least given us an insight into one in this story; has sympathetically revealed the passing of the girl into the woman's realm, with its infinitude of pathos and tragedy.

THE HATE OF MAN

By Headon Hill

Author of "The Duke Decides," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CYRUS CUNEO, R.I. *6s.*

Sir Charles Killerby, the proprietor of a great London daily newspaper, has been trying for many years to bring Simon Marwood to justice. The latter takes an oath to avenge himself on Sir Charles, who is the organiser of a strong defence against a great movement of foreigners plotting Great Britain's overthrow, in which the ex-convict is involved, together with Lester Cornwallis, who is a clerk at the War Office. How Augusta Killerby, Dolly Bede, and Adolphe Jebault play their parts in the ensuing events is told by Mr. Headon Hill with characteristic skill.

A LIFE'S ARREARS

By Florence Warden

Author of "The House on the Marsh," "The Heiress of Densley Wold," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by W. DEWAR. *6s.*

"Assuming that we were to invest it with due caution, as we should do," said the lawyer, "I think you might count upon something like £2,000 a year." Jane Maristow was stunned. From penury and a hard, humdrum, friendless existence in a Bloomsbury boarding-house to affluence by sheer good luck! It was like a dream. At first Miss Maristow hardly knew what to do with her wealth nor how to enjoy herself with it. After much deliberation she made up her mind to go to Monte Carlo, where she was involved in some most exciting adventures, which make excellent reading.

MY LOST SELF

By A. W. Marchmont

Author of "The Man who was Dead," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CYRUS CUNEO, R.I. *6s.*

Mr. Marchmont's new book is an invigorating narrative of adventure. In the author's best manner, it tells of a young American who finds himself a prisoner among brigands on an island off the coast of Italy. How he is thought a murderer by a beautiful and terror-stricken woman, and how the brigands themselves mistake him for one of their leaders, are two of many incidents which will grip all lovers of mystery, adventure, and passion.

THE AMETHYST CROSS

By Fergus Hume

Author of "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by DUDLEY TENNANT. 3*s.* 6*d.*

"The Amethyst Cross" is a novel full of thrilling situations and startling surprises. The plot is woven round an amethyst cross, in connection with which a fortune is concerned. Lesbia, the heroine, gives the jewel, which has been entrusted to her by her dying mother, as a love token to her *fiancé*, George Walker. How George is attacked and robbed of the cross is but one of the many dramatic events which hold the reader to the end.

LIFE'S CHEQUER BOARD

By Helen Wallace

Author of "The Coming of Isobel," "To Pleasure Madame," etc.

With 4 Illustrations by HOWARD SOMERVILLE. 6*s.*

The reader will find in this new book by the popular Scotch writer, Miss Helen Wallace, an abundance of incident, strong individual portraiture, and delightful descriptive touches which will recall the glow of the heather and the freshness of the hill breezes. It is a stirring story of self-sacrifice and unconscious love.

THE CAIRN OF THE BADGER

By Madge Barlow

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"The Cairn of the Badger" is the story of a dramatic conflict between two wilful men of well-contrasted temperaments, representing birth and poverty on the one hand, and plebeian blood and wealth on the other. Feminine intrigue holds the issue of the struggle in thrilling suspense, until a powerful and moving climax is reached.

THE REVENGE OF GILBERT STRANGE

By Walter Wood

Author of "The Lord of the Dyke," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by MAX COWPER. 6*s.*

Confident of the stability of the business inherited from his father, Gilbert Strange led a comfortable, easy-going life until the day when the great crash came. Financial ruin—followed by social ostracism, and his dismissal by his *fiancée*—revealed to him his real strength, and created the desire to avenge himself upon those who had triumphed in his downfall.

HOODMAN GREY, CHRISTIAN

By David Raeburn

With Frontispiece. 6s.

According to an ancient legend, the ghost of Judas Iscariot haunts a Cornish tin-mine, which is therefore locally known as the Old Judas mine. Querneby, a stern financier, who is sceptical with regard to religion, determines to speculate in Old Judas and re-open the workings. The preliminary operations lead to the discovery of the thirty rusty pieces of silver which were the price of "innocent blood." Hoodman Grey gives these coins, each of which seems to be an emblem of the universal mammon taint, to Lytton Clay, an extremely clever but indolent artist. The possession of the sinister silver inspires this man to paint a picture of Judas's face, in which the depths of racking remorse are so strikingly scored that everyone who beholds it is startled. To all who look upon the picture it seems to convey a reproach and a dread warning that "God is not mocked"; that the worship of Mammon is not compatible with His service.

Meantime, despite his fame and the widespread spiritual effect of his teaching, Hoodman Grey lives a saintly, unspoiled life, which is fittingly crowned by a sublime ending.

SHIPS OF DESIRE

By Kate Horn

With Frontispiece. 6s.

An interesting situation is created at the very outset of this story. Captain Lascelles is gallantly saved from death by his brother officer, Lord Canfield, and in the depth of his gratitude vows eternal devotion to his rescuer. Canfield's demand in this respect is extraordinary, and leads Lascelles (who is a man with a soul) into a bewildering position.

The regiment is stationed at Malta, and Canfield—to whom a *mariage de convenance* is both expedient and necessary—requires Lascelles to write his (Canfield's) love letters to the charming Elizabeth Blair. Lascelles performs his task with grace and fervour, and the beautiful girl falls "in love with love."

UTHER AND IGRAINE

By Warwick Deeping

Author of "The Slanderers" and "Love Among the Ruins."

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